BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

DEAD SEA FRUIT

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A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "MOHAWKS,"

ETC. ETC.

Stereotyped Edition

LONDON:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO., LIMITED,
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DEAD-SEA FRUIT

CHAPTER I.

QUITE ALONE.

THE marble image of Hubert Van Eyck stood out against the warm blue sky, and cast a slanting shadow across the sunlit flags. The July afternoon was drawing to a close. Low sunlight shone golden on the canals of Villebrumeuse, and changed every westward-looking window into a casement of gold. Those are no common windows which look out upon the quiet streets and lonely squares of that sleepy Belgian city. No handiwork of modern speculative builder is visible amid that grand old architecture—no flimsy nineteenth-century villa perks its tawdry head among those mediæval splendours—no upstart semi-detached abominations of spurious Gothic, picked out with rainbow-coloured brick, affright the eye by their hideous aspect. To live in Villebrumeuse is to live in the sixteenth century. A quiet calm, as of the past, pervades the shady streets. Green trees reflect themselves in the still waters of the slow canal which creeps athwart the city; and by the side of the tranquil waters there are pleasant walks o'ershadowed by the umbrage of limes, and wooden benches whereon the peaceful citizens may repose themselves in the evening dusk. In despite of its solemn tranquillity, this Villebrumeuse is not a dreary dwelling-place. If it has drifted from amidst the busy places of this earth—if the blustrous ocean of modern progress has receded from its shores, leaving it far away across a level waste of reef and sand—this quiet city has, at the worst, been left stationary, while the noisy tide sweeps on with all its tumult of success and failure—its prosperous ventures and forgotten wrecks. The peace which pervades Villebrumeuse is the tranquillity of slumber, and not the awful stillness of death. There is a jog-trot prosperity in the place, a comfortable air, which is soothing to the world-worn

spirit; but the wrestling, and scuffling, and striving, and struggling of modern commerce is unknown among the quiet merchants, who content themselves with supplying the simple wants of their fellow-citizens in the simplest fashion. And yet this city was once a mart to which the Orient brought her richest merchandise; and in the days gone by, these quaint old squares have been clamorous with the voices of many traders, and bright with the holiday raiment of busy multitudes.

A young Englishman walked slowly up and down the broad flagged square, across which the painter's statue cast its sombre shadow. He was teacher of English and mathematics in a great public academy near at hand, and his name was Eustace Thorburn. For three years he had held his post in the Villebrumeuse academy; for three years he had done his duty, quietly and earnestly, to the satisfaction of every one concerned in the performance. And yet he was something of an enthusiast, and something of a poet, and possessed many of those attributes which are commonly supposed to constitute a letter of license for the neglect of vulgar every-day duties.

That was an ardent and an ambitious spirit which shone out of Eustace Thorburn's gray eyes; but if the fiery sword had chafed the scabbard a little during three years of academical routine and Villebrumeuse monotony, the young man had been patient and contented withal. There was a public library in Villebrumeuse to which the tutor had free entrance, and in the mediæval chambers of this institution his leisure had been spent. That dreamy idleness amongst good books had been very pleasant to him; his work in the academy was endurable, despite its tedious and laborious nature; and he had a lurking tenderness for the quaint old city, the slow canals overshadowed by green trees, the simple people, and the old-world customs. Thus, if there were times when the eager spirit would fain have soared to loftier and fairer regions, the young student and teacher had not been altogether unhappy since his destiny had brought him to this place to earn his bread amongst strangers.

Amongst strangers? Were the inhabitants of this Belgian city any more strange to him than all the other inhabitants of this populous earth—except the one man and woman who made the sum total of his kindred and friends? Amongst strangers? Why, if the statue of Van Eyck could have descended from yonder pedestal to walk in the streets of the city, the animated effigy could scarcely have been a lonelier creature than the young man who passed to and fro athwart the sloping shadow on the flags this July afternoon.

Looking backward through the shadows of the past, how many of those images, familiar to most men, were wanting in the mystic pictures that memory presented to Eustace Thorburn!

Memory, let him question her never so closely, could not show him any faint tracing of a father's face flickering dimly athwart the half-consciousness of infancy. Nor could he, in surveying the events of his childhood, recall so much as one visit to a father's grave, one accidental utterance of a father's name, one object however trivial, associated with a father's existence—a picture, a sword, a book, a watch, a tress of hair. The time had been when he had been wont to question his mother about this missing father; but that was long ago. The time had come, and too quickly in this young man's life, when a precocious wisdom had checked his questioning, and he had learned to refrain from all reference to a father's name, as the one subject, of all others, most scrupulously to be avoided by his lips. He was twenty-three years of age, and he had never been told his father's name or position in the world. For the last ten years of his life it had been a common thing for him to lie awake in the solemn quiet of the night, thinking of that unknown father, and wondering whether he were alive or dead. He knew that he had no claim to the name which he bore, and that he had as good a right to call himself a Guelph or a Plantagenet as he had to call himself Thorburn.

How many childless men upon this earth would have been glad to call Eustace Thorburn son! How many of this world's magnates, with mighty names to transmit, would have rejoiced with unspeakable rapture, could they have set the joy-bells ringing for the coming of age of such an heir! As there are rare and peerless flowers that adorn inaccessible regions where no hand can gather them, where no eye may delight in their loveliness, so there are friendless creatures in the world who might make the joy of empty hearts, and be the pride of desolate households. The "something in this world amiss," which the poet has sung of, pervades every social relation. The plaintive wailing of the minor mingles itself with every earthly melody; and it is only by and by that the veil shall be lifted; it is only by and by that the mystic enigma shall be unriddled, and the full chords of perfect harmony peal on our ears, unmarred by that undertone of pain.

Not often has a nobler countenance looked upward to the countenance of the statue than that which looked at it with a dreamy gaze to-day. The face of the young man was, like the face of the statue, more beautiful by reason of its nobility of expression than because of its perfect regularity of feature. In Eustace Thorburn's countenance the intellectual radiance so far surpassed the physical beauty, that those who looked at him for the first time were impressed chiefly by the brightness of his expression, and were likely to take their leave of him in complete ignorance as to the shape of his nose or the modelling of his mouth

It is but a thankless task to catalogue such a face; the dark gray eyes which pass for black; the mobile mouth which, in one moment, seems formed to express an unbending pride and an indomitable will, and in the next will wreathe itself into such a smile that it must needs appear incapable of any expression but manly tenderness or playful humour; the loosely arranged auburn hair, which gives something of a leonine aspect to the lofty head; the complexion of almost womanly fairness, with a rich glow that comes and goes with every changing impulse or emotion—all these go such a little way towards the individuality of the young Englishman walking up and down the lonely square during his half-hour's respite from the monotonous duties of the afternoon.

This half-hour's holiday was not Mr. Thorburn's only privilege. He had two hours in every day for his own studies—two hours which he generally spent in the public library, for his ambition had shaped itself into a palpable form, and had mapped the outline of a career. He was to be a man of letters. If he had been a rich man, he would have shut himself in his library and made himself a poet. But as he was nothing but a nameless and penniless stripling, with his bread to earn, he had no right to indulge in the luxury of verse-making. The wide arena of literary labour lay before him, and he had no choice but to force his way into the lists, and fight for any place that might happen to be vacant. Fate might make of him what she would—journalist, novelist, dramatist, magazine-hack, penny-a-liner; but she must use him very cruelly before she could quench the fire of his young ambition, or bend the crest with which he was prepared to confront the world.

He had selected for himself this profession of literature chiefly because it was the only calling which demanded no capital from the beginner, and a little because the only kinsman he had in the world was a man who lived by his pen, and who might have prospered and won distinction by means of that fluent pen, had he not chosen to do otherwise.

The half-hour's respite expired presently, and a great clanging bell in the academy near at hand summoned the pupils to their evening lesson. It was a summons for the master also, and Mr. Thorburn ran across the square and turned into the street on which one side of the academy looked. He pushed open a little wooden door in the big gateway, and passed under the arched entrance; but before going to his class-room, he stopped to examine a rack in which letters addressed to the masters were wont to be kept. He rarely omitted to look at this rack, though he had very few correspondents, and only received about one letter in a fortnight. To-day there was a letter. His heart turned cold as he looked at it, for the envelope was bordered

with black, and addressed in the hand of his mother's brother who very seldom wrote to him. His mother had been an invalid for a long time, and such a letter as that could have but one fatal meaning. For months he had looked forward to his August holiday, which would enable him to go to England and spend a few happy weeks with that dear mother—and now the holiday would come too late.

He went out into one of the dismal playgrounds, a gravelled yard surrounded by high whitewashed walls, and read his letter. His tears fell thick and fast upon the flimsy paper as he read. Ten minutes ago, walking to and fro in the sunshine, he had lamented his loneliness, remembering that he had only two friends in the world. He knew now that the dearer of these two was lost to him. The letter told him of his mother's death.

"There is no need for you to hurry back, my poor lad," wrote his uncle. "The funeral is to take place to-morrow, and will be over when you get this letter. I saw your mother a fortnight before her death, and she then told me what she could never find the courage to tell you—that the end was very near. It came suddenly at the last, and I was out of the way at the time; but they tell me it was a calm and holy ending. Her last words were of you. She dwelt much on your goodness and devotion, Mrs. Bane tells me. The last two days were spent in prayer, poor innocent soul; and I, who stand in so much greater need of that kind of thing, can't bring myself to it for half an hour! Poor soul! Bane thinks it was for you she was praying, she repeated your name so often—sometimes in her sleep, sometimes when she was lying in a languid state between sleeping and waking. But she did not wish you to be sent for. 'It is better that he should be away,' she said; 'I think he knew that this day must soon come.'

"And now, my dear boy, try to bear up against this sorrow like a brave, true-hearted lad, as you are. I say nothing of what I feel myself, for there are some things which come with a bad grace from certain people. You know that I loved my sister; though, God knows, *I* never knew how dearly till yesterday, when I saw the blinds down at Mrs. Bane's, and guessed what had happened. Remember, Eustace, that so long as I can earn a crust, my sister Celia's son shall be welcome to his share of it; and though I may be a disreputable acquaintance, I can be a faithful friend. If you are tired of that slow old Belgian city, come back to England. We will manage your establishment here somehow. The impracticable Daniel has a certain kind of influence; and though he rarely cares to use it on his own account,—being so bad a lot that he dare not give himself a decent character,—he will employ it to the uttermost for a spotless nephew.

"Come, then, dear boy; a kind of heart-sickness has come over me, and I want to see the brightest face that I know in this world, and the only face that I love. Come, even if you must needs return to the whitewashed saloons of the Parthenée. There are letters and papers of your poor mother's which it might be well for you to destroy. My profane hand shall not tamper with them."

The young man thrust his kinsman's letter in his breast, and paced the playground slowly for some time, meditating the loss that had come upon him. In one of the big class-rooms near at hand his pupils were waiting for him; and there was wonderment and consternation at this delay in the most punctual of all the masters. His tears had dropped fast upon the letter some time ago; but his eyes were dry now. The dull agony which filled his breast was rather a sense of desolation than a poignant grief. He had seen and known that his mother was fading from this troubled earth before his coming to Belgium; and poverty's bitterest penalty had been the necessity which had separated him from her. The shadow of this coming sorrow had long darkened the horizon of his young life. The sad reality had come upon him a little sooner than he had expected it, and that was all. He bowed his head and resigned himself to this affliction; but there was something to which he could not resign himself, and that was the manner of his loss.

"Alone—in a hired lodging—with a poor, ill-paid, hard-working drudge for her sole companion and consoler! O mother, mother, you were too bright a creature for so sad a fate!"

And then there arose before this young man's eyes one of those pictures which were continually haunting him—the picture of what his life and his mother's life might have been, had things been different with them. He fancied himself the beloved and acknowledged son of a good and honourable man; he fancied his mother a happy wife. Ah! then how changed all would have been! Sickness and death would have come all the same, perhaps, since there is no earthly barrier that can exclude those dark visitors from happy households. They would have come, the dreaded guests, but with how different an aspect! He made for himself the picture of two death-beds. By one there knelt a group of loving children, weeping silently for a dying mother, while a grief-stricken husband suppressed all outward evidence of his sorrow, lest he should trouble the departing spirit whose earthly tabernacle was supported by his fond arms. And the other death-bed! Alas, how sad the contrast between the two pictures! A woman lying alone in a dingy chamber, abandoned and forgotten by every creature in the world except her son, and even he away from her.

"And for this, as well as for all the rest, we have to thank

him!" muttered the young man. His face, which until now had been overshadowed only by a quiet despondency, darkened suddenly as he said this. It was not the first time he had apostrophized a nameless enemy in the same bitter spirit. He had very often abandoned himself to vengeful thoughts about this unknown foe, to whose evil-doing he attributed every sorrow of his own, and all those hidden griefs and silent agonies so patiently endured by his mother. He kept a close account of his mother's wrongs, and of his own, and he set them all against this person, whom he had never seen and whose name he might never discover.

This nameless enemy was his father.

CHAPTER II.

A RETROSPECTIVE SURVEY.

From the mediæval tranquillity of Villebrumeuse to the dreary desolation of Tilbury Crescent is a sorry change. Instead of the quaint peaked roofs and grand old churches, the verdant avenues and placid water, there are unfinished streets and terraces of raw-looking brick, half-built railway arches, chasm-like cuttings newly made in the damp clay soil, and patches of rank greensward that mark the site of desolated fields. The sulphurous odours of a brickfield pervade the atmosphere about and around Tilbury Crescent. The din of a distant high-road, the roar of many wheels, and the clamour of excited costermongers, float in occasional gusts of sound upon the dismal stillness of the neighbourhood, where the shrill voices of children, playing hopscotch in an adjacent street, are painfully audible.

Decent poverty has set a seal upon this little labyrinth of streets and squares and crescents and terraces, before the builder's men have left the newest of the houses, while there are still roofless skeletons at every corner, waiting till the speculator who began them shall have raised enough money to finish them. The neighbourhood lies northward, and the rents of those yellow-brick tenements are cheap. So decent poverty, in all its many guises, comes hitherward for shelter. Newly-married lawyers' clerks take up their abode in the eight-roomed dwellings, and you shall divine, by the fashion of blinds and curtains, the trim propriety of doorsteps and tiny front gardens, whether the young householders have drawn prizes in the matrimonial lottery. Small tradesmen bring their wares to the little shops which break out here and there at the corners of the streets, and struggle feebly for a livelihood. Patient young dressmakers exhibit fly-blown fashion-plates in parlour windows, and wait hopefully or despairingly, as the case may be, for custom

and patronage. And in more windows than the chance pedestrian would care to count hangs the pasteboard announcement of apartments to let.

Eustace Thorburn came to Tilbury Crescent in the blazing July noontide. He had landed at St. Katherine's Wharf, and had made his way to this northern suburb on foot. He was rich enough to have ridden in an omnibus, or to have enjoyed the luxury of a hansom, had he been so minded; but he was an ambitious young man, and had cultivated the nobler Spartan virtues from his earliest boyhood. The few pounds in his possession would have to serve him until he returned to the Parisienée, or obtained some new employment; so he had much need to be careful of shillings, and chary even of pence. The walk through the dirty bustling London streets seemed long and weary to him; but his thoughts were more weary than that pedestrian journey under the meridian sun, and the sad memories of his youth were a heavier burden than the carpet-bag he carried slung across his shoulder.

He knocked at the door of one of the shabbiest houses in the crescent, and was admitted by an elderly woman, who was slipshod and slovenly, but who had a good-natured face, which brightened as she recognized the traveller. In the next moment she remembered the sad occasion of his coming, and put on that conventional expression of profound sorrow which people assume so easily for the affliction of others.

"Ah, dear, dear, Mr. Thorburn!" she cried, "I never thought to see you come back like this, and she not here to bid you welcome, poor sweet lamb!"

The young man held up his hand to stay the torrent of sympathy. "Please, don't talk to me about my mother," he said, quietly, "I can't bear it—yet."

The honest woman looked at him wonderingly. She had been accustomed to deal with people who liked to talk of their griefs, and she did not understand this quiet way of putting aside a sorrow. The mourners whom she had encountered had worn their sackcloth and covered themselves with ashes in the face of the world, and here was a young man who had not so much as a band upon his hat, and who rejected her friendly sympathy!

"I can have my—the old rooms, for a week or so, I suppose, Mrs. Bane?"

"Yes, sir. I've took the liberty to put a bill up, thinking as perhaps you might not return from abroad; and if it's for a week only, perhaps you'd allow the bill to remain? There are so many apartments about this neighbourhood, you see, sir, and people are that pushing now-a-days, that a poor widow-woman has scarcely a chance. It's a hard thing to be left alone in the world, Mr Thorburn."

There was an open wound in the heart of Eustace Thorburn which ignorant hands were always striking.

"It's a hard thing to be left alone in the world," he thought, echoing the landlady's lamentation. "*She* was left alone in the world before I was born."

The landlady repeated her question.

"Oh, yes, you can leave the bill; but don't let any one come to look at the rooms to-day. I am not likely to be here more than a week. Can I go upstairs at once?"

Mrs. Bane plunged her hand into a capacious pocket, and, after much searching the depths of that receptacle, produced a door-key, which she handed to Eustace.

"Mr. Mayfield told me to lock the door, sir, because of papers and such-like. The bedroom door is fastened on the inside."

The young man nodded, and went upstairs with a brisk, rapid footstep, and not with that ponderous, solemn tread which Mrs. Bane would have considered appropriate to his bereaved condition.

"And I thought he would have took on dreadful!" she ejaculated, as she went back to her underground kitchen, where there was generally an atmosphere laden with the steam of boiling soapsuds, or an odour of singed ironing-blanket.

Eustace Thorburn unlocked the door, and went into the room which had so lately been inhabited by his mother. It was a dingy little sitting-room, opening into a bedroom that was still smaller. It was a lodging of the same pattern as a thousand other lodgings in newly-built suburbs. The personalty of the woman who had left it for a still narrower lodging would scarcely have realized twenty shillings under the auctioneer's hammer; and yet to Eustace Thorburn the shabby room was eloquent of the dead. That dilapidated rosewood workbox—for which the auctioneer would have been ashamed to propose a starting bid of a shilling—conjured up the vision of a patient creature bending over her work. The little stand of books—cheap editions of the poets, in worn cloth binding—recalled *her* sweet face, illumined by a transient splendour, as the inspired verses of her favourites lifted her above this earth and all her earthly sorrows. The valueless china inkstand, and worn blotting-book, had been used by her for more than four years. Eustace Thorburn took the things up one by one, and put them to his lips. There was something almost passionate in the kiss which he imprinted upon those lifeless objects—it was the kiss which he would have pressed upon her pale lips, had he been recalled in time to bid her farewell. He kissed the books which she had been wont to read, the pen with which she had written, and then cast himself suddenly into the low chair where he had so often seen her seated, and abandoned himself to his grief. Had Mrs. Bane, the

landlady, heard these convulsive sobs, and seen the tears streaming between the fingers which the young man clasped before his eyes, she would have had no need to complain of Mr. Thorburn's want of emotion. For a long time he sat in the same attitude, still weeping. But the passionate grief wore itself out at last. He dashed the tears from his eyes with an impatient gesture, and rose, pale and calm, to begin the work which he had set himself to do.

His love for his mother had been the ruling passion of his life. She was at rest now, and he could face the future calmly.

He could go forth to meet his destiny with a spirit at once superior to hope and fear. It was for *her* he had hoped; it was for her he had feared. He stood alone now; his breast was no longer a rampart to shield her from "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." The arrows might come thick and fast now; they could only wound him; and he already had suffered the deepest wound that evil fortune could inflict upon him. He had lost *her*.

The bitterest sting of all lay in the knowledge that she had never been happy. Her son had loved her with unspeakable tenderness. He had protected her and worked for her, and admired and adored her; but he had never been able to make her happy. That gentle, womanly heart had been too deeply wounded in the past. Eustace Thorburn had known this; and knowing this had been patient, because he would not trouble her mild spirit by any show of impatience. He had known that she had been wronged, and yet had never asked her the name of the wrong-doer. He, her natural champion and avenger, had never sought for vengeance upon the man whose treachery or unkindness had blighted her life. He had held his peace, because to question her would have been to pain her; and how could he give her pain? So he had been patient, in spite of a passionate desire for ever smouldering in his heart—the desire to avenge his mother's wrongs.

She was at rest; and the time for vengeance had arrived. The same fatal influence which had destroyed her happiness had shortened her life. In the prime of womanhood, before a wrinkle had lined her forehead, or a silver thread appeared amidst her soft brown hair, she had gone to her grave, unutterably patient to the last, but broken-hearted from the very first.

The young man put his grief away from him, and set himself to consider the new business of his life.

The one desire of his mind was that of vengeance upon his mother's nameless enemy; and the thought that this enemy was his own father was powerless to soften his heart in the

smallest measure, or to hinder him for one single hour from the achievement of his purpose.

"I want to know who he is," he said to himself. "My first business must be to discover his name; my next, to make him more ashamed of that name than I am of my namelessness."

He went to the chimney-piece, where there was a letter waiting for him, sealed with a sprawling black seal, and addressed to him in the inscrutable penmanship of his uncle.

The envelope contained only a few lines, but enclosed in it there was a little bunch of keys, with every one of which the young man was familiar. He took them up with a sigh, and looked at them one by one, almost as tenderly as he had looked at the books. The commonest object in that chamber had its association for him,—and with every such association, the grief which he had tried so hard to put away from him took possession of him anew.

There was a ponderous, old fashioned mahogany desk on a side-table, and it was in this desk that the lonely inhabitant of the room had been accustomed to keep her letters and papers, together with those few valueless relics—that pitiful jetsam and flotsam from the shipwreck of hope and happiness which are left to the most desolate creature.

Eustace unlocked and opened the desk as softly as if his mother had been sleeping near him. He had often seen her seated at this desk; he had once surprised her in tears, with a little packet of letters in her hand, but he had never seen the contents of any of those discoloured papers, tied with faded ribbons, and disfigured by obsolete postmarks. And now that she was gone, it was his duty to examine those papers,—or so he considered. Yet there was a shade of compunction in his mind as he touched the first packet, and he felt as if he had been committing a sacrilege.

The first packet was labelled "My Mother's Letters," and contained the epistles of some good womanly creature, written to a daughter who was away at boarding-school. They were full of allusions to a comfortable middle-class household—a tradesman's household, as it seemed, for there were occasional references to events that had occurred in the shop, and to "my dear husband's over-exerting himself in the business," and to "Daniel's unsettled ways and indisposition to take to his father's occupation."

Eustace smiled faintly as he read of poor Daniel, whose unsettled ways had been notorious before Sir Rowland Hill's post-office amendments, and who remained unsettled in these latter days of electric telegraphy and labyrinthine railway cuttings.

The letters were very sweet, by reason of the tender motherly

spirit which pervaded every line,—more or less ill-spelt here and there, and by no means well written, but overflowing with affection. Again and again the writer implored her "dearest Sissy" not to fret, and to look forward to the holidays, which would come very soon, when Sissy would see her dear mother and father, whose household love she pined for in the great middle-class boarding-school, as it was evident by the tone of maternal letters which replied to lamentations from desolate home-sick Sissy. There were hampers for dearest Sissy, and little presents,—a coral necklace from father, a sash from mother, and once, a tinselled portrait of Mr. Edmund Kean in the character of Othello, with a tunic of real crimson satin let into the paper,—a tinselled portrait which had been poor unsettled Daniel's labour of love in the long winter evenings, and which the mother dwelt on with evident pleasure.

Eustace knew that these letters had been written by his grandmother,—the grandmother who had never held him in her arms, or taken pride in his baby graces. He lingered lovingly over the old-fashioned sheets of letter-paper,—he gazed fondly upon the stiffly-formed signature, "Elizabeth Mayfield," and he dropped some few tears upon the worn yellow paper, which had been blotted with many tears before to-day. It was not possible that he could think of his mother in her innocent school-days without emotion.

The second packet contained only three letters, addressed to dearest Sissy at home, when she had ceased to be a school-girl, and these were in a hand not altogether unfamiliar to Eustace. It was a youthful modification of Daniel Mayfield's inscrutable caligraphy; and again Eustace Thorburn smiled with the same faint smile. The letters were written from a lawyer's office where the lad was articled; for Daniel had persisted in his aversion to his father's business, and had declared himself unfitted for anything upon earth except the law, for which he was assured he had a special vocation. They were pleasant, boyish letters, and full of the slang of the day—such locutions as "Flare up!" and "What a shocking bad hat!" and "There you go with your eye out!" and other conversational embellishments peculiar to the period. But through all the slang and young-mannish affectations there was an undercurrent of genuine affection for the writer's "dear little dark-eyed Sissy." He knew no end of pretty girls in London, he told her, but not one worthy to be compared with his darling Celia. "And when I am on the Rolls, with slap-up chambers of my own in the Fields, and a first-rate business, you shall come and keep house for me, Sissy; and we'll have a little cottage at Putney, and a wherry, and I'll row you up the river every evening after business; and while my sentimental little sister sits in the stern reading a novel her

faithful Daniel will get himself into training for a sculling-match."

The first two letters were full of hopeful allusions to the writer's prospects. The young man seemed to fancy he was going to make a royal progress through the different grades of his profession, and there was scarcely any limit to the pleasant things which he promised his only sister. But, in the third letter, written after an interval of six months, all this was changed. The life of an articled clerk was a slavery, compared to which the existence of a negro in the West Indian sugar-plantations must be one perpetual delight. Daniel was tired of his profession, and informed his dearest Sissy, in strict confidence, that no power on earth would ever make a lawyer of him.

"It isn't in me, my dear Celia," he wrote; "your impetuous Dan is not fashioned out of the stuff which makes an attorney. I've tried to take to the law, just as I tried to take to the circulating-library and fancy-stationery business, to please poor father and mother; but it's no use. You mustn't say anything to the dear old dad, for he'd begin to be unhappy about the money he wasted on my articles; and before he discovers that I don't take to the law, I shall have taken to something which will make me a rich man, and I shall be able to give him back his money three times over."

And then Daniel Mayfield went on to give a flourishing description of a very bright and splendid castle-in-the-air which he had lately erected. He had found a Pactolus in his inkstand, and something better than a landed estate in a quire of foolscap. He was a genius. The divine *afflatus* had descended upon him, and Coke and Blackstone might go hang. He was a poet, an essayist, an historian, a novelist, a playwright—anything you like. He had been a scribbler from the days of his childhood, and of late had scribbled more than ever. And after the innumerable failures and disappointments which constitute that Slough of Despond through which every literary aspirant must pass, he had succeeded in getting an article inserted in one of those coarsely-written and poorly-illustrated comic periodicals from the ashes whereof arose that bright Phœnix, *Punch*. And the editor of the periodical had promised to take further contributions from the same lively pen, Daniel informed his sister. He had received two guineas sterling coin of the realm for his lucubration, "thrown off in half an hour," he told dear Sissy. And thereupon he entered into a calculation of his future income, at the rate of four guineas an hour for all the working-hours in the day. "Messrs. Screwem and Swindleton don't get as much for their time, in spite of their genius for running up the six-and-eightpences," wrote Daniel.

There was a mournful smile upon Eustace Thorburn's face as

he read the letters. He knew the writer so well, and knew into what a poor, imperfect, dilapidated habitation that air-built castle had resolved itself. The young man had not deceived himself as to his own powers; he had only wasted them. The talents had been his, and he had scattered the precious gifts here and there with a reckless hand—too rich to fear poverty, too strong to apprehend exhaustion. He had thrown his pearls before swine, and had allowed his diamonds to be set in worthless crowns of brass and tinsel. The flower of his youth had faded, while he, who might have achieved greatness—and that which seems a deal more difficult for genius to achieve, respectability—was only Dan Mayfield, a newspaper hack, one of a modern Jacob Tonson's "clever hands," a lounger in taverns, a penniless Bohemian, with flowing hair, which time was beginning to thin, and eyes at whose corners the crow had set the ineffaceable print of his feet.

Eustace replaced the letters with a respectful hand. Was he not tampering with the ashes of his mother's youth, and was not every paper in that desk sanctified by the tears of the dead?

"Poor Uncle Dan!" he murmured, gently; "poor, kind, sanguine Uncle Dan!"

CHAPTER III.

"TAKE BACK THESE LETTERS, MEANT FOR HAPPINESS."

THERE were several notes and letters in the next packet which Eustace Thorburn examined, and over these he lingered very long—reading some amongst them a second time, and returning to reconsider others which he had put aside after a first perusal. These letters were written on the thickest and finest paper, and exhaled a faint odour of millefleurs, so faint as to be only the impalpable ghost of a departed perfume. Notes and letters were alike dated, but the only signature to be found amongst them was the single initial H.

Eustace read them in the order in which they had been written.

"'The author of the book which Miss Mayfield was reading on Tuesday afternoon has called at the library three times since that day, but has not had the happiness of seeing her. Will Miss Mayfield be good enough to write one line, saying *when* she may be seen? The writer, who feels himself unworthy of her eloquent praises, most earnestly wishes for an interview, if only of a few minutes' duration.

"'*The George Hotel. June* 6, 1843."

"The author of the book?" repeated Eustace; what book? Was this man a writer?"

This letter had been delivered by hand. The next bore the postmark of Bayham, that Dorsetshire watering-place to which Daniel's letters had been addressed. It was directed to

"C. M.,
"*The Post-Office,*
"*Bayham.*

"*To be left till called for.*"

"The seducer's favourite address," muttered Eustace, as he unfolded the letter.

"*George Hotel, June* 15, 1843.

"My dear Miss Mayfield,—If you could know the time I have wasted since Thursday week, in the vain endeavour to obtain a glimpse of your face, between the sheets of music and coloured lithographs in your father's window, you would be more inclined to believe what I told you on that day. I told you that if I did not see you, I should write, and I told you where I should address my letter. You forbade me to write, and assured me that my letter would lie at the post-office unasked for. But you, who are so sweet and gentle, could hardly adhere to such a cruel resolve. I dare to hope that this will reach your hands, and that you will forgive me for having disobeyed you.

"I do so much wish to see you again—if only once more—yes, even if only once. I am haunted day and night by the vision of that sweet face which I first saw bending over one of my own books. Do you remember that day?—only three weeks ago; and yet it seems to me as if a new existence began for me upon that day, and as if I were older by half a lifetime since then. Sweet tender face, with the dark eyes and wild-rose bloom, shall I ever learn to forget it? Will it ever cease to come between me and my books? I was trying to read a grand old tragedy last night: but you would not let me. You were Electra, and I saw you bending over your brother's funereal urn, as I had seen you bending over the silly volume which you praised so sweetly. The Greek tragedy reminded me of that doctrine of fatality which we laugh at in these modern days. And yet surely Destiny has her hand in the fashion of our lives. I had been writing letters on the day on which I first saw you, and the people here had given me such wretched pens and paper that I sallied out to seek better for myself. If they had given me decent writing materials, I might never have seen you. There are three other places in the town at which I might have sought what I wanted; but Destiny laid her hand on my coat-collar, and conducted me to your father's library. I went in quietly, with all my thoughts two hundred miles away from Bayham. I saw you sitting be-

hind the counter, with a book in your lap; and all my thoughts came back to Bayham, to take up their abode with you for ever. You were so absorbed in your book, that you did not hear my modest request for a quire of letter-paper, until it had been three times enunciated; and I meanwhile had time to read the title of the book which interested you. I suppose every writer can read the title of his *own* book upside-down. You looked up at last, with such a pretty, shy, innocent look, and the wild-rose bloom came into your cheeks. And then I asked you what you thought of the book; and you praised it with such bewitching eloquence, and wondered who the writer could be. I had heard the book lauded by a great many people, and abused by more; but I had never until that moment felt the smallest temptation to reveal myself as the author of it. I had, indeed, taken great trouble to conceal my identity. But when *you* praised my work, I flung prudence to the winds. It was so delightful to see your bright blush, your bewitching confusion, when I told you that it was my happiness to have pleased you. O Celia, if you like my book so well, why is it that you distrust and avoid me? Let me see you, dear, I implore—anywhere—at any time—under any conditions you may choose to impose upon me. I wait in this dull town day after day, in the hope of seeing you. A hundred duties call me away! and yet I wait. I shall wait for a week after having posted this letter; and if I receive no sign from you during that time, I shall leave Bayham, never again to venture within its fatal precincts.

"Ever and ever faithfully yours,
"H."

There was an interval of six weeks between the dates of the second and third letters; and there was a considerable alteration in the tone of the writer. He no longer pleaded for an interview with the stationer's daughter. It was evident that he had seen her very often during the interval; and his letter was full of allusions to past meetings.

"My own sweet Love," he began,—(ah, what a change in six short weeks from "My dear Miss Mayfield!")—"my ever dearest, there is *no* gulf between us, or no gulf so wide that love cannot bridge it over. Why are you so cruel as to doubt and avoid me? You know that I love you. You told me that you believed it my love last night when we stood by the sea in that sweet twilight, and when there was such a solemn quiet all around us that it would have been easy to fancy ourselves cast away upon some desert island. You talk to me of your humble birth,—as if the birth of an angel or a goddess could be humble,—and you implore me to go back to the world and its slavery, and to forget this bright glimpse of something better than the world. I am

only five-and-twenty, Celia; and yet I fancied I had outlived the possibility of such love as that which I feel for you.

"You told me on Saturday that your father's anger would be something terrible if he discovered our acquaintance. I should put an end to all your fears, dearest, by going straight to Mr. Mayfield and demanding the right to call you my own for ever, if I were not fettered hand and foot by social difficulties. You have some cause to doubt me, Celia; and if you were not the most generous of women, I should fear to speak frankly. Whenever we are married, our marriage must be kept secret until my father's death releases me from bondage. You will think me a coward, perhaps, when I confess to you that I dare not openly defy my father; but you can scarcely imagine how complete the slavery of a son may be when he is an only son, and his father cherishes grand views for his advancement. I write about these wretched obstacles to our happiness, my sweet one, because when you are with me I *cannot* speak of the difficulties which beset us. My troubles take flight when those dear eyes look up at me. I forget this work-a-day world and all its ills; and I could fancy this earth still the home of the gods, and foolish Pandora's casket unopened. When I am away from you, all is changed, and hope only remains.

"So I shall make no allusion to this letter when we meet, dearest. We will be children, and fancy this world young again. We will wander arm-in-arm on that delicious stretch of golden sand beyond the curve of the bay, and far away from the bustle of the town. We will forget all our commonplace difficulties and troubles, and that the gods have abandoned the earth. Ah! if we had only lived in those mythic ages, when Eros himself might have taken compassion upon our sorrows, and transported us to some enchanted isle, where our youth and love should be immortal as his own divinity!

"Let me see you at seven, dear love. I shall await your coming at the old spot, and you will easily shake off your confidante and companion, Miss K. Can you suggest any feminine prettiness which Miss K. would care to possess? I should like to offer her some testimony of my respectful admiration; she has been so very indulgent to us, in her own prim fashion. Let me know whether it is to be a necklace, or a bracelet, or a pair of earrings, and I will see what the Bayham jeweller can do for us. And now, dearest and loveliest, adieu for a few hours; and may Phaethon whip his horses to the West, and bring the sweet sunset hour and the rosy light upon our favourite stretch of sand.

"Ever and ever yours,

"H."

There were many more letters less playful and more pas-

sionate—the dates extending over six or seven weeks; and then there was a considerable interval, and then two letters written in the January of the following year. The writer had won his dearest Celia's consent to a clandestine marriage. She was to leave her home secretly, and was to go with him to London, where all arrangements had been made. It was very evident that her consent to this step had not been won without great difficulty. The letters were full of protestations and promises. The writer was always repeating how his heart had been wrung by the sight of her tears, how the thought of her sorrow was almost more than he could bear. But he had borne it, nevertheless, and had persisted in his own designs, whatever they might be, for the last letter contained all necessary directions for the girl's flight. She was to meet her lover at the coach-office after dark; and they were to travel the first stage of the journey by the night-mail, and then take post across country and get to London by a different road; so that any one following them, or making inquiries about them on the direct road from Bayham, would be completely baffled.

This was all—and yet more than enough for the young man, who sat brooding over the last letter with a gloomy face. It was such a common story, and so easily put together: the poor, weak, provincial beauty, who is lured away from her quiet home under the pretence of a secret marriage, a marriage which is never solemnized, and was never intended to be solemnized; then the brief dream of happiness, the noontide holiday in a new garden of Eden, with the fatal serpent, which is called Remorse, always in hiding beneath the flowers; and the speedy close to that fever-dream of bliss—utter despair and bitterness. This was the hackneyed romance which Eustace Thorburn wove out of the packet of letters signed with the initial H.; and it was so cruel and humiliating a story that the young man suffered his weary head to sink upon the little heaps of paper, and wept aloud.

He had recovered in some measure from this passion of grief, and was employed in arranging the letters, when the door was opened, and a man came into the room. The man was somewhere between forty and fifty, and was a very remarkable-looking person. He had once been handsome—of that there was no doubt, but the flower of his youth had faded in some pernicious atmosphere, and the chilling blasts of a premature autumn had blighted him while he should have been still in all the glory of his midsummer prime. He had a fiery red nose, and fiery black eyes, and dark hair, which he wore longer than was authorized by the fashion of the day. There were gray hairs amongst those straggling dark locks, and the man's moustache had that tinge of Tyrian purple in its blackness which betrays the handi-

work of the chemist. He was a man of imposing presence, tall and stalwart; and although he lacked the conventional graces of a modern gentleman, he was not without a certain style and dash of his own. To-day he wore mourning, and there was an unwonted softness in his manner. This was Daniel Mayfield; a man whose genius had been of much use to other people, but of little benefit to himself, and a man who contemplated the visage of his deadliest foe whenever he looked in the glass.

Yes, the only enemy Mr. Mayfield had made was himself. Everybody liked him. He was your true Bohemian, your genuine Arab of the great desert of London. Money ran between his fingers like water. He had been more successful, and had worked harder, than men whose industry had won for them houses and lands, horses and carriages, plate and linen and Sèvres china. His acquaintance were always calculating his income, and wondering what he did with it. Did he gamble? Did he speculate on the Stock Exchange? Did he consume fifteen hundred a year in tavern parlours? Daniel himself could not have answered these questions. He wondered as much as any one about this mysterious enigma. He had never known how he spent his money. It went, somehow, and there came an end to it. Jack borrowed a few pounds; and there was a night's card-playing, through which the luck went against poor Dan; and there was a Greenwich dinner on Tom's birthday; and he took a fancy to a rare old copy of the *Diable Boiteux*, on large paper, sold at Willis and Sotheran's; and then there were occasional periods of famine, during which Dan had recourse to a friendly usurer, for whose succour he ultimately paid something like a hundred and fifty per cent. So the money went. Daniel was the last person to trouble himself as to the manner of its departure. When his pockets were empty, he called for pen, ink, and paper, and set himself to fill them.

To-day this reckless genius was something less then his accustomed self. The fierce black eyes were shadowed by a settled sadness of expression, and the rollicking swagger of the Bohemian was changed to an unwonted quietness of gait and gesture. He stood for a few moments near the doorway, contemplating his nephew. The young man looked up suddenly and stretched out his hands.

"Dear Uncle Dan!" he cried, grasping the outstretched hands of his visitor. The fierce grip of his uncle's muscular fingers was the only direct expression of sympathy which he received from that gentleman. The men understood each other too well for there to be need of many words between them.

Daniel looked at the open desk.

"You have been examining your mother's papers," he said, in a low voice. "Have you discovered anything?"

"More than enough, and yet not half what I must know, sooner or later. I have never asked you any questions, Uncle Dan. I couldn't bring myself to do it. But now—now that she is gone——"

"I understand you, dear boy. I know little enough myself (for I never could find it in my heart to question her, God bless her!), but you have a right to know that little; and if you can put the story together out of anything you have found there—" said Daniel, pointing to the desk.

"I understand the story—I want to know the name of the man!" cried Eustace, passionately.

"I have wanted to know that for the last twenty years," answered Daniel.

"Then you can tell me nothing?"

"I can tell you very little. When I left home to be articled to a brace of London lawyers, I left the brightest and loveliest creature that ever a man was proud to call his sister. We were the two only children of comfortable tradespeople in a quiet little watering-place, you know, Eustace. We lived in a square, brick-built house, facing the sea. My father kept a circulating-library and reading-room, and my mother did something in the millinery line. Between them both they made a very comfortable income. Bayham was a sleepy, out-of-the-world place, in which a tradesman who once manages to establish himself, generally enjoys a snug monopoly. I know that we were very well off, and that we were people of importance in our way. My sister was the prettiest girl in Bayham. She faded so early, became so complete a wreck, that you can scarcely imagine what a lovely creature she was in those days. She was ashamed of the notice her beauty drew upon her, and she had a pretty, childish shyness of manner which made her all the more charming. A great hulking hobbledehoy of eighteen seldom knows what beauty is; but I knew that my sister was lovely, and I admired and loved her. I used to boast of her to my fellow-clerks, I remember, and made myself obnoxious by turning up my uncultivated nose at their sisters. I was so proud of our little Cely."

He stopped and shaded his eyes with his hands for some minutes, while Eustace waited impatiently.

"To make a long story short," continued Daniel, "there came a letter from my father, written in a very shaky style, and almost incoherent in its wording, to tell me that they were in great trouble at home, and that I was to go back to them immediately. Of course I thought of money troubles—we are such sordid creatures by nature, I suppose—and I fancied there was commercial ruin at home, and thought remorsefully of all the money I had cost my father, and the little good I had ever been to him.

When I got to Bayham, I found that there was something worse than want of money in the grief-stricken household. Celia had disappeared, leaving a letter for my father, in which she told him that she was going away to be married; but there were reasons why her marriage and the name of her husband should be kept a secret for some time; but that he had promised to bring her back to Bayham directly he was free to reveal his name and position. Of course we all knew what this meant; and my father and I set out to seek our poor cheated girl, with as gloomy a despair at our hearts as if we had gone to seek her in the realms of Pluto."

"And you failed?"

"Yes, lad, we failed ignominiously. There were neither electric telegraphs nor private detectives in those days; and after following several false scents, and spending a great deal of money, we went back to Bayham—my father looking ten years older for his wasted labour. He died three years after that, and my mother followed him very quickly, for they were one of those old-fashioned couples who cling to each other so fondly through life, that they must needs sink together into the grave. They died; and the poor girl, whom they had forgiven from the very first hour of her offending, was not permitted to comfort their last hours. They had been dead more than twelve months when I saw a woman's faded face flit past me in the most crowded part of the Strand. I walked on a few paces, with a strange sudden pain at my heart, and then I turned and hurried after the woman, for I knew that I had seen my sister."

There was another brief pause—broken only by the short eager breathing of Eustace, and one profound sigh from Daniel.

"Well, boy, she had been living in London for more than three years, hidden in the same big jungle which sheltered me, and Providence had never sent me across her path. She had been living as many such lonely creatures do live in London; managing to exist somehow—now by means of one starvation work, now another. I went home with her, and we gathered her few pitiful possessions together, and carried them and you away with us in a cab, and—you know the rest. She lived with me until you were old enough to be in danger of suffering from a bad example; and then she made some excuse for leaving me—poor innocent soul, she was afraid lest dissolute Daniel should contaminate her pet-lamb. In all the time that we were together, I forbore to question her; I always believed that she would confide in me sooner or later, and I waited patiently in that hope. She told me once that she had made two journeys to Bayham—the first while her father and mother were still alive, and that she had waited and watched, under cover of the winter evening darkness, until she had contrived to see them both; the

second, when they were lying in the parish churchyard. This was all she ever told me. I asked her one day if she would tell me the name of your father. But she looked at me with a sad, frightened face, poor child, and said No, she could never tell me that; he was away from England—at the other end of the world, she believed. This was the only attempt I ever made to penetrate the secret of your birth."

"The letters—the man's letters—are full of allusions to an intended marriage. Do you think there was no marriage?"

"I am sure there was none."

Eustace groaned aloud. For a long time he had suspected as much as this; but to hear his suspicions confirmed by the opinion of another was none the less bitter.

"You have some reason for saying as much, Uncle Dan?" he asked presently.

"I have this reason, Eustace: if my sister could have come back to Bayham, she would have come. The sorrow must have been a very bitter one which kept her away from her father and mother."

The young man made no reply to his uncle. He walked to the window, and looked out at the dreary street, where the perpetual organ-grinder, who seems to grind all our sorrows in a musical mill, was grinding on at the usual pace. For the common world the thing which he played was an Ethiopian melody; but Eustace never afterwards heard the simple air without recalling this miserable hour, and the story of his mother's luckless life.

He came back to his kinsman. Heaven pity him, the law denied him even this human tie, and it was only by courtesy he could call this man his uncle. He came away from the window and flung himself on honest Daniel's breast and sobbed aloud.

"And now take me to my mother's grave," he said presently

CHAPTER IV.

UN MÉNAGE À DEUX.

Harold Jerningham lived in Park Lane. To say this, and to say in addition to this that it was his privilege to inhabit a snug little bachelor dwelling, with bay-windows from the roof to the basement, is to say that he was one of those favoured beings for whom this world must needs be a terrestrial paradise. There are mansions in Park Lane, stately and gigantic—mansions with lofty picture-galleries, and staircases of polished marble, and conservatories which roof-in small forests of tropical verdure:

but the glory of this western Eden lies not in them. Are there not mansions in Belgravia and Tyburnia, in Piccadilly and Mayfair? Palaces are common enough in this western hemisphere, and the roturier may find one ready for his occupation, seek it when he will. But it is only in Park Lane that those delicious little bachelor snuggeries are to be found, those enchanting toy-houses, "too small to live in, and too big to hang at your watch-chain," as Lord Hervey said of the Duke's cottage at Chiswick—those irregular little edifices, with bow-windows, and balconies, and miniature conservatories breaking out in every direction, and with a perfume of the country still about them.

The house which Harold Jerningham occupied when he favoured the metropolis by his presence was one of the most enchanting of these enviable habitations. The house had been a pretty old-fashioned cottage with bow-windows, when Mr. Jerningham took it in hand, but in his possession it had undergone considerable change. He had transformed the rustic bows into deep roomy bays, and had thrown out balconies of iron scroll-work, whereon there flourished bright masses of flowers, and ferns, and mosses, amidst which no eye save that of the nurseryman's minions ever beheld a faded leaf. He had built mysterious and spacious chambers at the back of the small dwelling, on ground that had once been a garden; and beyond these chambers you came suddenly upon a shady quadrangle roofed-in with glass, where there was a wonderful tesselated pavement, which had been transported bodily from a chamber in Pompeii, and where there were ferns and cool grasses, and a porphyry basin of water-lilies, and the perpetual plashing of a fountain.

Mr. Jerningham had furnished his house after his own fashion, without regard to the styles that were "in," or the styles that were "out." One rich carpet of dark crimson velvet-pile lined the house from the hall to the attics, like a jewel-casket; and the same warm and yet sombre tint pervaded the window-hangings and the walls. The ordinary visitor found very little to admire in Mr. Jerningham's drawing-room. Thin-legged tables and chairs, adorned with goats' heads and festoons of flowers; a shabby little writing-table, considerably the worse for wear, but enlivened by patches of china, whereon rosy little Cupids frisked and tumbled against a background of deep azure; a generally untidy effect of scattered bronzes and intaglios, gold-and-enamel snuff-boxes and bonbonnières, Chelsea tea-cups, and antique miniatures; and on the walls some tapestry, just a little faded, with the eternal shepherds and shepherdesses of the Watteau school. The connoisseur only could have told that the spindle-legged chairs and tables were in the purest style of the Louis-Seize period; that the shabby little writing-table with the

plaques of old Sèvres had belonged to Marie Antoinette, and had been sold for something over a thousand pounds; that the bronzes and intaglios, the miniatures and bonbonnières were the representatives of a fortune; and that the somewhat faded tapestry was the choicest work of the Gobelins, after designs by Boucher.

Harold Jerningham was fifty years of age, and one of the richest men in London. The poorer members of the world in which he lived talked of him as "a lucky fellow, by Jove, and a man who ought to consider himself uncommonly fortunate never to have known what it was to be hard-up, or to have a pack of extravagant sons sucking his blood, like so many modern vampires, confound 'em!" Harold Jerningham had neither sons nor daughters, and lived in a bachelor's snuggery. But Harold Jerningham was not a bachelor. He had married a very beautiful young first cousin some seven years before, and the union had not been a happy one. It had only endured for two years, at the end of which time the husband and wife had separated, without open scandal of any kind whatsoever. Mr. Jerningham had chosen that occasion for a long-postponed journey to the East, and Mrs. Jerningham had quietly withdrawn herself from the toy-house in Park Lane to another toy-house on the banks of the Thames, within two or three hundred yards of Wolsey's old palace at Hampton. But let man and wife arrange their affairs never so quietly, the world will have its own ideas, and make its own theories on the subject. The world—that is to say, Mr. Jerningham's world, which was bounded on the south by Great George Street, Westminster, and on the north by Bryanstone Square—told several different stories of Mr. Jerningham's marriage. The beautiful young cousin had possessed the real Jerningham pride, which was the pride of the Miltonic Lucifer himself, wherefore the peaceful union of two Jerninghams was an impossibility, said one faction. But the majority were inclined to believe Mr. Jerningham in some manner guilty. Neither his youth nor his middle age had been spotless. Too proud and too refined to affect coarse vices or common dissipations, he had done more mischief and had been infinitely more dangerous than the common sinner. The master of a ruined household had cursed the name of Harold Jerningham, and innocent children had grown up to blush at the mention of that fatal name. For three-and-forty years of his life he had been a bachelor, and had laughed at the men who bartered their liberty for the sake of a wife's monotonous companionship and the prattle of tiresome children. He had not been a deliberate sinner—indeed, the deliberate sinners seem to be a very small minority, and even the man who poisons his wife with minim doses of aconite will tell the gaol-chaplain that he was a poor,

weak creature, led away from time to time by the impulse of the moment. The Tempter took him by the hand, and drew him on, foot by foot, to his destruction. There is a thick and blinding fog for ever hanging over that fatally easy slope which leads to Avernus, whereby the traveller cannot perceive what progress he has made upon the dreadful downward road.

Mr. Jerningham had not been a deliberate sinner. He was not altogether vile and wicked. He was too selfish a man not to wish for the approbation of his fellow-man; he was too much of a poet and an artist not to perceive the loveliness of virtue. He was not an honourable man, but he knew that honour was a very beautiful thing in the abstract, and he had a vague sense of discomfort when he acted dishonourably—just such an unpleasant sensation as he would have felt if he had worn an ill-fitting coat or an ill-made boot. He was not without benevolence, and could even be generous on occasion; but in all his useless life he had never sacrificed his own enjoyment for the good of another. He had taken his pleasure—all was told in those few words—and if pleasure was only to be had at the cost of evil-doing, he had shrugged his shoulders regretfully, and paid the price. He had gathered his roses, and other people had been inconvenienced by the thorns. The roses were still blooming about his pathway, but Mr. Jerningham no longer cared to pluck them. A man may grow tired even of roses. His marriage had been the result of one of those generous impulses which redeemed his character from utter worthlessness. A kinsman had died in Paris, in the extreme depths of patrician poverty, leaving behind him a very lovely daughter, and a letter addressed to Harold Jerningham. The lovely daughter came to London, unattended, to deliver the letter, which she presented with her own hands to the elegant bachelor of three-and-forty. If she had not been a Jerningham, there is no knowing what story of sin and folly this interview might have inaugurated. But she was the daughter of Philip Jerningham, and the direct descendant of a Plantagenet prince; so, after a brief acquaintance, she became the wife of the eldest representative of her family, and the mistress of that delicious little house in Park Lane, to say nothing of parks and mansions, farms and forests, in three of the fairest counties in England.

She ought to have considered herself the most fortunate of women, said the western world. Whether she did so consider herself or not, it speedily transpired that she was not a happy woman. For a few months the world had the pleasure of beholding Mr. Jerningham in frequent attendance on his wife. He handed her in and out of carriages, he went out to dinner with her, he stood behind her chair at the Opera, he was even seen occasionally to drive her in his unapproachable mail-phaeton·

and this seemed the perfection of domestic felicity. Then there came an interregnum, during which the Jerninghams were rarely seen together. They led an erratic existence, the rule of which seemed to be that Mr. Jerningham should be at Spa when his wife was in London, and that Mrs. Jerningham should be on her way to one of the country houses whenever her lord came to town. Then all at once arose the awful rumour that the Jerninghams had parted from each other for ever. Elegant gossips discussed the subject at feminine assemblies, and men talked about it in the clubs. Why had the Jerninghams separated? Was he to blame? Was she? Had Jerningham, the irresistible, dropped in for it at last? Or had he been playing his old trick, and had the little woman plucked up a spirit, and cut him? It is to be observed that Mrs Jerningham was amongst the tallest of her sex; but your genuine club-lounger would call Juno herself a little woman.

It became generally understood before long that Harold Jerningham had himself alone to thank for the failure of his matrimonial venture. He made his name somewhat notorious just at this time in conjunction with that of a French opera-dancer; so Mrs. Grundy shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly, and pitied Mrs. Jerningham. "A superb creature, my dear; the very model of propriety; and a thousand times too good for that dissipated wretch, Harold Jerningham," exclaimed the sagacious Mrs. Grundy.

While the world made itself busy with the story of her brief married life, Emily Jerningham endured her wrongs and sorrows very quietly in the toy-villa at Hampton. She had an ample income settled on her by her husband; and as she had been steeped in poverty to the very lips before her marriage, it is scarcely strange, perhaps, if she forbore to complain of Mr. Jerningham's conduct, and elected to talk about him—whenever intrusive people compelled her to mention his name—as her friend and benefactor. The world lauded her generosity, but considered itself injured by her reticence.

For the first twelve months after the separation, Mrs. Jerningham secluded herself from all society except that of a few chosen friends, and devoted herself to the cultivation of orchids at the toy-villa. She started with the intention of passing the remainder of her days amongst the chosen friends and the orchids; but she was young and handsome, rich and accomplished, and society had chosen to exalt her into a social martyr. So people penetrated the depths of her suburban retreat, and beguiled her to return to the world, of which she had seen so little. She went into society, tolerably secured from the hazard of meeting her husband, who had his own particular circle, and that a very narrow one. Emily Jerningham was liked and ad-

mired. She was a beauty of the Juno type, and the Jerningham pride became her. It was not by any means an intolerable pride, never parading itself on unnecessary occasions—pride defensive, not pride aggressive; the pride of a prince who will be hand-and-glove with his dear Brummell, but who will order Mr. Brummell's carriage when the beau is insolent. Mrs. Jerningham was very popular. She had all the charm of widowhood without its danger. There was even the faintest flavour of Bohemianism about her position, spotless though her reputation might be. She was a saint and martyr who gave nice little dinners, and drove the most perfectly appointed of pony-phaetons. It was only by an indescribable something—a tranquil grace of bearing, a subdued ease of manner, a pervading harmony in every detail of her surroundings, from the unobtrusive colouring of her costume to the irreproachable livery of her servants—that strangers could distinguish her from other unprotected women of a very different class.

Young men were ready to worship and adore her. "If the gurls a fellah meets were like Mrs. Jerningham, a fellah might make up his mind to go in for the domestic," said young Tyburnia to young Belgravia. "S'pose the odds are against Jerningham going off the hooks between this and the first spring-meeting, so as to give a party a chance with Mrs. J. herself," speculates young Belgravia, dreamily.

Mrs. Jerningham had enjoyed her quasi-widowhood some two years, when Mrs. Grundy's attention was called to a new phenomenon in connection with that lady.

It was observed that whoever was bidden to the nice little dinner-parties at the toy-villa, there was one gentlemen whose presence was a certainty. It was observed that whenever Mrs. Jerningham dropped in for an hour or two at any fashionable assembly, this gentleman was sure to drop in at the same hour, and to depart, listless and weary, as soon as he had handed that lady to her carriage. He was not one of the butterflies, but had been admitted amongst those gorgeous creatures on account of certain gifts and qualities which the butterflies were able to appreciate. He was a powerful satirist, something of a poet and the editor of a fashionable semi-political, semi-literary periodical, entitled the *Areopagus*. He was five-and-thirty years of age, as handsome as an intellectual man can venture to be, and as elegant as a Lauzun or a Hervey. He had chambers in the Temple, a hunting-box in Berkshire, the *entrée* to all the best houses in London, and a hundred country houses always open to him. The Bohemians of the press watched his career with envious eyes, and would have rejoiced infinitely to catch him tripping on the difficult editorial pathway, so that they might band themselves together to rend him in pieces. The

first time these watchful enemies obtained any advantage over him was when the western world began to whisper that he had fallen in love with Mrs. Jerningham. Then the literary Bohemians, the "Cherokees" and "Night-birds," and all the little clubs and cliques in London, set up their malicious chatter; and men who had never beheld Emily Jerningham's face speculated upon her conduct and gloated over the anticipation of some tremendous scandal which should terminate in Laurence Desmond's expulsion from the Eden of fashion.

The clubs and cliques were doomed to disappointment. No tremendous scandal ever arose. After a little discussion, the world agreed to accept this Platonic attachment between the lady and the editor as the most delightful of social romances. Mrs. Jerningham had taken care to provide herself with a perfect dragon in the way of an elderly widowed aunt, whose husband had been in the Church—and, sheltered thus, she was free to bestow her friendship on whom she pleased. Time, which sanctifies all things, gave a kind of legality to the Platonic attachment; and in due course it became an understood thing that Mr. Desmond should never marry until Harold Jerningham's death should set Emily free.

If any rumour of this romantic friendship reached Mr. Jerningham's ears, he received the tidings very quietly. No *preux chevalier* ever spoke of his liege lady in a more reverential spirit than that in which Harold Jerningham spoke of his wife. It seemed as if these two people had agreed to sound each other's praises. Emily declared her husband to be the most noble and generous of men; Harold lauded his wife as the purest and most honourable of women. Malicious people shrugged their shoulders and hinted at hypocrisy.

"Jerningham was always a Jesuit," said one; "he is the Talleyrand of social life. And if you want to arrive at what he means, you must take the reverse of what he says."

"If they are both such delightful creatures, what a pity it is they couldn't live peaceably together!" said another.

CHAPTER V.

THE EDITOR OF THE "AREOPAGUS."

AMONGST the contributors to the literary periodical of which Mr. Desmond was the editor, Daniel Mayfield occupied no insignificant position. The most genial and good-natured of men was at the same time the most ferocious and acrimonious of critics. When an innocent lamb was to be led to the slaughter,

it was Daniel who assumed the butcher's apron and armed himself with the deadly knife. When a wretched scribbler was, in vulgar phraseology, to be "jumped upon," honest Daniel put on his hobnailed boots, and went at the savage operation with a will. The days were past in which the Edinburgh reviewer apologized with a gentle courtesy before he ventured to express his dissent from the opinions of a lady historian. Criticism of to-day must be racy, at any price. Daniel's strong arm smote right and left, cleaving friend and foe indiscriminately asunder; and if it was on a woman's head that the blow descended, so much the better. The woman should have been at home studying her cookery-book, or working that domestic treadmill, the sewing-machine, instead of jostling her betters in the literary arena. "Hark forward, tantivy!" cried Daniel the critic; "run her down, trample her in the mud, make an end of her! She would quote Greek, would she? Why, the creature can barely spell plain English! She would prate of gods and goddesses, whose names she picks hap-hazard from a cheap abridgment of Lemprière. She would discourse of fashion and splendour, forsooth, who was 'born in a garret, in a kitchen bred.'" Daniel the man was tender and courteous in his treatment of all womankind; but Daniel the racy essayist knew no mercy.

Daniel the pitiless was one of Mr. Desmond's most valued coadjutors, and had received many offers of kindly service from that gentleman; but the literary Bohemian had refused all.

"A government appointment for me!" he cried, when the popular editor offered to use his influence with a Cabinet minister in Daniel's favour; "why, I should languish in the trammels of an official life. Regular hours and a regular salary would be the death of me in less than six months. I was born a dweller in tents, my dear Desmond, and my instincts are naturally disreputable. I can work seven hours at a stretch, and produce more copy in a given time than any man in London. I have been locked up in a room with a wet towel, a bottle of Scotch whiskey, and half a ream of paper, and have written five-and-thirty pages of a popular magazine between sunset and sunrise. But I must take it out in vagabondage afterwards. I am of the stuff which makes your Savages and your Morlands, and I shall die in a sponging-house when my time comes, I have no doubt. Nevertheless, I will ask a favour of you some day, Desmond; but it shall be for somebody better worth serving than I am."

Within a week of Eustace Thorburn's return, Daniel Mayfield presented himself at the editor's chambers. He had done no work for the *Areopagus* for some little time, and Mr. Desmond was glad to bid him welcome.

"I've been thinking of looking you up for the last three

weeks, Dan," said the editor, striking his pen across half a page of proof. "What second-hand twaddle this man writes! We want the sterling metal of your stylus, old fellow."

"Any new victim to be flayed alive?" asked Daniel. "I've been rather seedy for the last week or two, and perhaps a little of the old work will set me right again."

"You'll find plenty of material there," answered Mr. Desmond, pointing to a heap of cloth-covered volumes. "What have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last? No good, I suppose," he added, without looking up from the proofs on which he was operating.

"Well, no, not much good. It's a business I shouldn't care about repeating; but it's a business that must be done—it must be done, Desmond, sooner or later, in every man's life, I suppose."

The unwonted gravity of Daniel Mayfield's tone surprised his friend. Laurence Desmond looked up from his desk, and for the first time perceived the change in his erratic contributor's costume.

"In mourning, Dan! I'm sorry to see that," he said, gently.

"Yes; I have buried the dearest friend I ever had—my only sister. God bless her! The *Freethinker's Quarterly* people won't get me to do any more deistical articles for them, Laurence. I'm a bad fellow myself, with no opinions in particular about anything in heaven or earth. How should I have opinions? I've sold 'em too often to other people to have any left for myself. But I like to think that *she* is in heaven, and I'll never write a 'rational' essay again as long as I live."

The two men shook hands upon this, *without* effusion—as it is the habit of Englishmen to do.

"And now to business," said Daniel. "You once offered to get me a government appointment, and I told you I wasn't fit for one. I haven't forgotten your offer, or the kindness that prompted it. My sister has left a son—a lad of three-and-twenty. He is clever, honourable, ambitious, and indefatigable; but, except myself, he has neither friend nor relative in the world. He has been a tutor in a great Belgian academy, and the principal will certify his merits. If you can serve him, Desmond, you will do me treble service."

"What kind of thing do you want for him?"

"A private tutorship, or the post of secretary to a man worth serving. The lad is a fair classical scholar, and a good linguist. He is a great deal more than this into the bargain; but I am so fond of the fellow that I am afraid of praising him too much."

"Bring him here to dine to-morrow night," said Mr. Desmond; "I'll think the matter over in the meantime. I dare say I shall

hit upon something to suit him. Why doesn't he take to this sort of thing?"

The editor of the *Areopagus* laid his hand upon the proofs.

Daniel Mayfield shook his head sadly.

"Anything but that, Desmond. I don't want him to be a publisher's hack. I don't want him to put my worn-out old shoes on his brave young feet, and tread the miry road along which I have travelled. I don't want him to make merchandise of his best and purest feelings while the stock lasts him, and deal in sham sentiments and spurious emotions when the real ones are worn out. I don't want him to weep maudlin tears over philanthropic leaders, or work himself into an unreal fury over the denunciation of a political measure he has barely had leisure to consider. I don't want him to sell his convictions to the highest bidder—to be Conservative one day, Liberal the next, and Radical the day after. He 's too good for my work, Desmond, and he 's too good for my company. When he was old enough to be injured by a bad example, his poor mother took him away from me—though I was sorry enough to part with the little rascal, and it went to her heart to give me sorrow. She is gone now, Desmond, and it is my duty to see that the boy comes to no harm."

"Has he any of your talent, Dan?"

"He has something better than my talent, sir," answered Mayfield, gravely. "The lad has the soul of a poet, and is destined to be one. There is real genius there, sir—not the marketable trash I deal in. He has written verses which have brought the tears into my eyes: consider that, sir—tears from such a hardened wretch as your Daniel should count for something. I want some quiet, comfortable position for him, in which he will have a little leisure to think his own thoughts. I want him to bide his time; and some day, when his intellect has ripened and mellowed, the divine breath will inflate his nostrils, and we shall have a new poet."

"I think I can get him exactly the sort of thing you want," answered Laurence Desmond; "but I must first make sure he is fit for it. Bring him at half-past seven to-morrow, and let me see if he is worthy of your praises. You 'll take those books, and send me copy to-morrow, eh?"

Daniel nodded, took the books under his arm, shook hands with his friend, and departed—departed, with peace and goodwill and all Christian feelings in his big, generous heart, to annihilate the luckless wretch who had written a stupid novel.

Daniel and Eustace dined in the Temple the next evening, and sat late over their wine in the summer twilight. Laurence Desmond was delighted with the young man. He led him on

to talk freely on his own sentiments and opinions, while Daniel listened with a fond smile to his nephew's eloquent discourse. It was pleasant to Mr. Desmond, whose lot had been cast in that serene and exhalted sphere in which there was no such thing as emotion—it was very pleasant to the popular editor to come in contact with this fresh young nature, and to discover that, even in this age of high-pressure, a man may retain youthfulness of spirit, faith in his fellow-creatures, pure and poetic aspirations, and childlike simplicity of feeling, after his twenty-third birthday.

"The young men I know have been used up at nineteen," thought Laurence; "and there are hardened wretches of five-and-twenty more *blasé* than Philip of Orleans at forty-eight."

From talking of his opinions, Laurence Desmond led Eustace on to talk of himself and his own experiences; and before Daniel and his nephew departed, the young man's future was in some measure provided for.

"A very old and dear friend of mine," said Mr. Desmond, "has for some time been in want of a secretary and amanuensis to assist him in the completion and publication of a great work to which he has devoted many years of his life—a work which he calls the *History of Superstition*, and which, I believe, is as dear to him as his only child. I have been trying to find him the kind of person he wants, but have hitherto failed most completely. There are plenty of shallow, flippant young fellows who would like the position well enough, for the salary will be a decent one, and my friend is the best and kindest of men; but, until now, I have met no one capable of giving him the assistance he wants. Your knowledge of languages and your Villebrumeuse reading—which seems to have been very wisely chosen,—exactly fit you for the position. If you can tolerate a quiet life in the heart of the country, I can offer you the situation, Mr. Thorburn, and may conclude all arrangements with you, on my own responsibility."

"If your friend is a gentleman, I say 'Done!'" cried Daniel Mayfield, heartily; "nothing could be better suited to this boy."

He laid his hand caressingly on the young man's shoulder as he spoke.

"And you'll be safe out of my way, lad," he murmured, softly, "and I shall lose my bright-faced boy—so much the better for him, so much the worse for me!"

"My friend is something more than a gentleman," answered Laurence Desmond. He is a *preux chevalier*. He is the descendant of a noble old Spanish family—a Frenchman by birth and education, and half an Englishman by long residence in England. He lives in a picturesque old house near Windsor

and on the banks of the Thames; such a spot as one scarcely expects to see out of Creswick's pictures. I don't see much of him, for my life is too busy for friendship; and—and there are other reasons that keep us asunder," added Mr. Desmond, with some slight embarrassment of manner.

"Can you exist in the country, Mr. Thorburn?" he asked presently.

"I love the country so well that I can scarcely exist in London, except for the sake of my uncle's society."

"Which is about the worst thing you can have!" growled Daniel.

"Ah! you are a poet, and a poet should live amongst lonely woods and sylvan streams. Well, you will be delighted with my friend, Theodore de Bergerac, and still more delighted with the place he lives in. I'll write to him to-morrow, and tell him I've found the blue diamond of the nineteenth century, a young man who does not affect to be old. Can you go to him immediately?"

"M. de Bergerac will no doubt wish to hear from my late employer, the principal of the Parthenée," Eustace answered, after some hesitation.

"Not at all. I will be responsible for the character and qualifications of my old friend's nephew. There need be no delay on that account," said Laurence.

"There need be no delay on any account, then," exclaimed Daniel; "the boy is ready to leave London to-morrow, if necessary."

I beg your pardon, Uncle Dan. Unless M. de Bergerac really wants me immediately, I should be glad of a week's delay," said Eustace, with considerable embarrassment. "I have some business to do before I leave London."

"Business!" cried Daniel; "what business?"

"I will tell you all about it by and by, Uncle Dan."

"My friend has waited six months, and he can afford to wait another week," said Laurence, good-naturedly. "Come and see me when your business is finished, Mr. Thorburn."

"Good-night, and thank you, Desmond," said Daniel, wringing his friend's hand with muscular heartiness. "I told you that a favour to him is thrice a favour to me; and if ever I have a chance of proving that I meant what I said, I won't let the opportunity slip."

When the two men had left the Temple, and were walking homewards through quiet back-streets, Daniel Mayfield turned sharply upon his nephew.

"What the deuce is to keep you in London for a week, Eustace?" he asked.

"I want to go to Bayham, Uncle Dan, to make some inquiries that may help me."

Daniel laid his hand on the young man's arm.

"Drop that, lad," he said, earnestly. "I 've thought about it for twenty years to no end. No good will ever come of it—nothing but disappointment and vexation, shame and sorrow. Forget the past, and start fair; the world is all before you. You have got your chance now. Desmond is a friend worth having; and this man De Bergerac may be a good friend too, if you serve him well. Wipe out the memory of that old story, my lad. Your father has chosen to ignore you; ignore him, and cry quits. The day may come when he 'll hear your name, and regret that he has forfeited the right to call you his son. Don't waste your thoughts upon him, Eustace. The man may be dead and gone for aught we know. Let him rest."

"And my mother's wrongs—are they to be forgotten? Do you remember the other evening in Highgate Cemetery, Uncle Dan? You thought I was praying, perhaps, when I knelt by my mother's grave; but I was not praying. On my knees beside that newly-laid turf I swore to be revenged on the man who blighted the life of her who lies beneath it. I must find that man, Uncle Daniel, and you must help me to find him."

"Was there no clue to his identity to be found in those letters?" asked Daniel, after a pause.

"Only one, and that a very slight one. He had written a book,—a book which seems to have been popular, and which my poor mother was reading when first he saw her. Can you remember any particular book which attracted attention in '43?"

"No, my lad; my memory is not good enough for that. There are people who might be able to remember, and there are literary papers that might help you. But scarcely a year goes by in which there are not a dozen books that make some slight sensation. This must have been a woman's book, though,—a poem or a novel, or something of that kind,—or your mother would scarcely have been reading it."

"The book was published either anonymously or under some *nom de plume*," said Eustace; "and even if I discover the right book, I may not be able to identify it with the writer. So you see the clue is a very poor one. I shall go to Bayham, Uncle Dan. Accident may help me to some better clue than the letters afford. The man was staying at the George Hotel; I may make some discovery there. He speaks of a Miss K., a friend and confidante of my mother. Can you tell me who she was?"

"Sarah Kimber!" cried Daniel,—"undoubtedly Sarah Kimber, a girl whose father kept a linendraper's shop, and who went to school with Celia. My poor sister and she were fast

friends; but I never could endure her. She was a lank, lantern-jawed, whitey-brown girl, and I always thought her deceitful. Good God! how the old time comes back as you talk to me! I can see the little parlour at Bayham, and those two girls seated side by side on an old-fashioned, chintz-covered sofa, with an open window and a green trellis-work of honeysuckle and jasmine behind them. I can see it all, Eustace, as fresh and vivid as a picture at a private view—Celia so bright and lovely; that Kimber girl an unconscious foil to her beauty."

"Do you know if this Miss Kimber is still alive?"

"No, lad. Bayham may lie fathoms deep beneath the sea, like the mystic city of Lyonesse, for anything I know. I have never been there since the day of my mother's funeral."

"I shall try to find Miss Kimber, Uncle Dan. She may be able to tell me a great deal."

"As you will, dear boy. If you took poor old Dan's advice, you would let the story rest. But youth is fiery and impetuous, and must take its own course. If ever you do find *that man*, Eustace, let me know his name, for he and I have a heavy reckoning to settle."

CHAPTER VI.

AT BAYHAM.

Eustace Thorburn went to Bayham, and took up his quarters at the George Hotel. The Dorsetshire watering-place had once been fashionable; but its fashion had departed, and an atmosphere of decay pervaded the grandeurs of that bygone day. Happily, the departure of fashion, which had never had any hand in the loveliness of the bay and the broad yellow sands, had robbed the Bayham shore of no grace or charm. The changing opal waters retained their brightest hues, though only west country gentry came to look upon them. The golden sands were golden still, though the crystal chandeliers and sconces which had once adorned the assembly-room had been sold by auction, and the room itself converted into a Baptist chapel.

There had been many changes at the George within the last twenty years. That once popular establishment had been superseded by a gigantic, stuccoed railway-hotel—itself a dismal failure—and the last two proprietors had been insolvent. Eustace Thorburn sought in vain for a visitors' book dated '43. All such books had been sold for waste paper years ago, and the only creature to be found in the hotel who had belonged to the same establishment in the year '43 was a semi-idiotic ostler. Eustace abandoned all hope of information in this quarter, and

went out into the little seaside town to look for the house in which his mother's childhood had been spent.

He found the place easily enough. It was still a circulating library and reading-room, and as he lingered before the gaily decorated window, Eustace Thorburn could fancy that nameless stranger, who dated his letters from the George, peering between the lithographs and sheets of music in the hope of seeing Celia Mayfield's fair young face.

"Why could not an honest man have fallen in love with her?" he asked himself, savagely. "Why must it needs be a villain who was first to discover the charm of her innocent beauty?"

He went into the shop. There was a girl sitting behind the counter, half hidden by a high desk, and busy with some shred of needle-work. The young man pictured his mother sitting in the same spot, and all of a sudden the face and figure of the girl grew dim and blurred before his eyes. He was fain to look about him for a few moments, as if seeking some special object, before he could trust himself to speak. Then he asked for some stationery, and contrived to occupy the girl for a considerable time, while he selected what he wanted, and questioned her about the towns-folk.

"Was there any person of the name of Kimber still living in Bayham?" he asked. The girl told him that there were several Kimbers: Mr. Kimber, the plumber, in New Street; Mr. Kimber, the house-agent, at the corner of the Parade; and Kimber and Willows, the drapers, in High Street.

"The person I wish to find is, or was, a Miss Kimber—Sarah Kimber," said Eustace; "and I believe her father was a draper."

"Ah!" exclaimed the damsel; "then that is the Miss Kimber who married Mr. Willows. Mr. Willows was head-assistant to old Mr. Kimber, who died five years ago. He left all his money and his business to Miss Kimber—being his only daughter, you see, sir; and as soon as she left off her mourning, she married Mr. Willows. He is a very handsome man, Mr. Willows, and nearly ten years younger than Miss Kimber that was, and they do say Mr. and Mrs. Willows do not live happily together."

Eustace went straight from the library to the establishment of Messrs. Kimber and Willows. It was a big, glaring shop, with a great deal of plate-glass and gilding, and a gaudy display of dresses and ribbons, bonnets and parasols. A smirking young man pounced immediately upon the stranger, asking what he might please to want; and by him Eustace was conducted to Mrs. Willows, who sat at a desk at the end of the shop, in a perfect bower of ribbons and millinery. She was attended by a bevy of damsels, who were busied in the construction of caps and bonnets, and whom she addressed with extreme acidity of tone

and manner. She was not a pleasant-looking person; and if old Mr. Kimber's money had changed into withered leaves on her inheritance of it, she could scarcely have seemed to have profited less by the dead man's wealth, so pinched and hungry was her aspect.

She favoured Eustace with the nearest approach to a smile of which her thin lips were capable, but regarded him with evident suspicion when she heard that he wished for a private interview.

"If you are travelling in the drapery line, you needn't trouble yourself to show your patterns," she said, decisively; "we have dealt with Grossam and Grinder for the last twenty years, and we never take goods from strangers. There are some new people on the other side of the way who may wish to deal with you, if you'll give them long credit and take their bill for your goods, I dare say; but I don't recommend you to trust them. When people come into town without sixpence of capital, and try to undersell an old-established house, they have only themselves to blame if they get into the *Gazette*. However, *I* say nothing; it's no affair of *mine*. The increase of our business is wearing me to the grave, and I should be the last to begrudge new people a chance, however unfair *their* way of proceeding may be."

Eustace had been quite unable to stay this torrent of indignation against the people on the other side of the street; but when Mrs. Willows paused to take breath, he informed her that he was not a commercial traveller, and that he had nothing to do with drapery, either wholesale or retail.

"I very much wish to obtain a few minutes' conversation with you in private," he said, glancing towards the young milliners, who had honoured him with a furtive scrutiny while Mrs. Willows was not looking at them, and had returned to their work with an exaggerated appearance of industry directly they felt her cold gray eyes upon them.

That important personage hesitated. It was rather an agreeable sensation to have a handsome young man pleading for a private interview, and she looked towards the other end of the shop, where her husband was displaying cotton prints to an elderly customer of the housekeeper class, with the faint hope of awakening in that gentleman's breast some twinge of the jealousy which so often racked her own.

"If you will step upstairs to the drawing-room," she said to Eustace, "you can explain your business without interruption."

Eustace followed Mrs. Willows to an apartment on the first floor, an apartment which was made splendid by a great deal of bead-work, and by occasional glimpses of a very gaudy Brussels carpet; but the splendour whereof was somewhat subdued by chaste coverings of brown holland and crochet-work.

The linendraperess seated herself in one of the holland-covered

arm-chairs, and arranged the rustling folds of her stiff silk dress. Having settled herself deliberately thus, she sat looking at Eustace with her hard gray eyes, waiting for him to speak.

And this had been his mother's friend, this hard, prosperous, vulgar woman! they had been girls together, and had shared all manner of simple girlish pleasures! Eustace looked at the woman sadly, thinking how wide a difference there must needs have been between the two girls, and how little real sympathy or womanly tenderness could have ever softened the heart of Mrs. Willows.

"I have to apologize for this intrusion," he said, after a pause; "for the business that brings me to Bayham is a personal matter, which can have very little interest for you. I am anxious to obtain all possible information respecting a family of the name of Mayfield, and more especially Miss Mayfield, the only daughter of a librarian in this town, who, I am given to understand, was very intimate with you some four-and-twenty years ago."

The lady's mouth, tight and hard at the best of times, tightened and hardened itself to an abnormal degree as Eustace said this. A pale fire kindled in the cold gray eyes, and the stiff shoulders and elbows adjusted themselves anew with increased stiffness.

"Yes," said Mrs. Willows, "I knew Celia Mayfield."

"You and she were friends, I believe?"

"We were *companions*," replied Mrs. Willows, with spiteful promptitude. "Even at this distance of time I should blush to own that Celia Mayfield and I were ever friends."

The whitey-brown complexion of the draper's wife seemed incapable of anything approaching a blush; but Eustace's face glowed with an angry crimson as the woman said this.

"May I inquire *why* you would be ashamed to confess your friendship for Miss Mayfield?" he asked, his voice tremulous with suppressed passion. It was so difficult to sit quietly by while a spiteful woman belied his mother's name; it was so difficult to refrain from crying out: "I am her son, and am ready to uphold her as the best and purest of women!" And to own himself her son, would have been to betray the sad secret of her hapless life.

"May I ask what reason you have to be ashamed of your girlish friendship?" he repeated, in steadier tones, when he had waited some moments for Mrs. Willows' reply.

"Because Celia Mayfield's conduct was shameful," answered the woman; "though, goodness knows, it's not much wonder that a girl who had been spoiled, and petted, and flattered, until she didn't know whether she stood on her head or her heels, *did* turn out badly. Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield made a fool of their daughter. *I* was an only daughter, and an only child, too, for the matter of that; but my father was a sensible man, and *I*

was never brought up to read novels and think myself a beauty I kept house for my poor pa when I was fourteen years of age; and if there was a halfpenny wrong in my accounts, he didn't hesitate to box my ears. And I feel the benefit of it now," added Mrs. Willows, triumphantly. "This business would not be what it is if my father's property had been left to a frivolous person.'

"And you considered Miss Mayfield a frivolous person?"

"Frivolous to a degree that makes me wonder I could eve waste my time in her company."

"Will you do me the favour to tell me all you know of the circumstances under which Miss Mayfield left her home?" said Eustace. "I can assure you that my motive for making these inquiries is no idle or unworthy one. You will be doing me a great service if you will give me what information you can in relation to this subject."

"If you put it in that manner, I will tell you all I know," answered Mrs. Willows, "though it is not a pleasant subject—especially to me, who might have suffered by Celia Mayfield's conduct. Goodness knows what people might have said of *me*, if my pa's position in Bayham hadn't been what it was."

There was a pause, during which the woman rearranged her silk dress, and then she began her friend's story with a stony face, and extreme deliberation of manner.

"I suppose you are aware that Celia Mayfield ran away from her home with a gentleman called Hardwick, or at least calling himself Hardwick, who was staying at the George Hotel, when he became acquainted with her, and who it was easy to see was very much above her in station. Indeed, how she could ever bring herself to think that he would marry her, would be a mystery to me if I did not know how her vanity had been fostered and her looks praised by people who ought to have known better. She did think so; and when I warned her of the danger her imprudent conduct might lead her into, she persuaded me to think the same. 'Very well, Celia,' I said; 'you know best; but it isn't often that a gentleman whose pa is in parliament marries the daughter of a stationer.' He had let it slip that his father was a member of parliament, and he had let many things slip which proved that he belonged to rich people and to high people."

"He was a young man, I believe?"

"Five-and-twenty at most, and very handsome."

As Mrs. Willows pronounced these words, her gaze became suddenly fixed, and she sat staring at her visitor with an expression of extreme astonishment.

"Perhaps you are related to him?" she said, interrogatively.

"I never saw him in my life. But why do you ask the question?"

"Because you are like him. I didn't notice the resemblance until just now; for it's so long since I saw him that I'd almost forgotten what he was like. But as I spoke to you his face came back to me. Yes, you are very like him. And you are really not related?"

"I tell you again, Mrs. Willows, that I never saw this man in my life. It is the Mayfield family in which I am interested. Pray go on with your story."

The beating of his heart quickened as he spoke. He had discovered something at least from this woman. It was something to know that he resembled the nameless father who had abandoned him.

"The likeness between us is a birthright of which he could not rob me," thought the young man; "or he would have deprived me of that, as well as of the rest."

"I believe the gentleman had written a book," resumed Mrs. Willows: "a story, or a novel, or something of that kind. Celia went on about it in her childish way. It was the most beautiful story that ever was written, and so on, she said. My poor pa forbade me reading novels, and I had to give my solemn promise that no book from the circulating-library should ever enter this house, before he would allow me to walk out with Celia Mayfield. When she began to read the book, she didn't know anything about the author; but while she was reading it he happened to go into the shop, and she went on about the story to him as she had gone on about it to me; and I suppose his vanity was flattered by her childish talk, for there never was such a childish creature about books and flowers and birds. He told her that he had written the book; and then he wrote to her, first a note, which was delivered by his servant, who hung about the library until he got the opportunity of giving it to Celia unknown to any one; and then letters, which were addressed to the post-office: and she showed me the letters. I said, 'Celia, these are not letters which a prudent young woman ought to receive.' But it was no use talking to her. The first letter that was sent to the post-office lay there nearly a fortnight before she went to fetch it; and all that time she went on about it to me when we were out walking; for he had told her he should write, and address his letter to the post-office. Should she fetch it, or shouldn't she? I said, 'If you take my advice, Celia, you will have nothing to do with it. People who mean honourably don't send their letters to post-offices.' But one evening, when we were coming home from a walk, we passed through the street where the office is; and she let go my arm all of a sudden, ran into the shop, and came out with a letter in her hand. As soon as we turned the corner into a bye-lane, where there was nobody about, she kissed the letter, and went on like a mad thing, and then she read it to

me; and she was as proud and happy as if a king had written to her."

"God help her, poor innocent soul!" murmured Eustace, tenderly.

"I don't know what you call *innocence*," exclaimed the matron; with severity; "but if you consider *that* the conduct of a prudent young woman, I do not. The end of the story proved that I was right. Celia and I had been in the habit of walking on the sands in a sheltered place beyond the bay, where there was very little company, and where two young women could walk together without being followed or stared at. We walked there almost every evening when it was fine, and the gentleman at the George used to meet us there, and talk to Celia. I told her that I disapproved of these meetings; but she had a way of talking people over, and she talked me over, and made me believe what she believed. If the gentleman really wanted to marry her, there could be no harm in her meeting him in the company of a young female friend. Things went on like this for some time, and then, when the summer season was quite over, the gentleman went away. Celia fretted a great deal; but she told me he was coming back in the winter to see her father and to explain everything, and there 'd be an end to all secrecy. I said, 'Celia, don't build upon his coming back. It 's not my wish to make you unhappy; but, if you take *my* advice, you 'll forget all about him.'"

"But he did return?"

"I suppose he did, though I never saw him after the summer. I gave Celia Mayfield good advice, and she wasn't pleased to hear it. We had some words upon the subject; and as my pa's position was very superior to Mr. Mayfield's, it was not likely I should suffer myself to be put upon by his daughter. When Celia wanted to make friends with me, I declined; and from that time we never spoke. I sat under Mr. Slowcome, at the Baptist chapel in Walham Lane, and Celia Mayfield attended the parish-church; so we didn't often meet. When we did meet, Celia used to look at me in her childish way, as if she wanted to be friends; but I made a point of looking straight before me. I heard nothing more of the Mayfields until one morning in the winter, when a young person came into our shop and told me that Celia had run away from home."

"Was the manner of her leaving generally known?"

"It was not. The Mayfields kept things very close. There was a great deal of talk, as you may suppose, and people had their opinions; but nothing was ever known for certain; and from that time to this I have never set eyes on Celia Mayfield."

"And you never will," said Eustace, solemnly. "She is dead."

Mrs. Willows murmured an expression of surprise. Her hard grim face softened a little, and when she spoke again, her tone was less severe.

"I am sorry to hear that," she said. "I never expected to meet Celia Mayfield again; but I am sorry to hear that she is dead."

Even for this hard nature the sanctity of the grave had some softening influence. The linendraper's wife could afford to think a little more indulgently of the spoiled and petted beauty whose loveliness had been so bitter to her, now that she knew her rival had passed into those shadowy regions where earthly charms count for so little. Some faint touch of tenderness, some memory of her own youth—when Bayham was gayer and more pleasant, and even the sands and the sea had seemed brighter to her than now—came back to the grim, purse-proud tradeswoman, and one solitary tear glittered in her stern gray eye. She brushed it away quickly, ashamed of the human emotion.

"You can tell me nothing more respecting the man who lured your friend from her home?"

"Nothing. Celia told me that the name by which we knew him was an assumed one, but she never told me his real name. I don't believe that even she knew it. She told me that he was very grand and very rich; and it was easy for any one to discover from his conversation that he was a gentleman, and had travelled half over the world."

"Do you remember the title of the book that he had written?"

Mrs. Willows shook her head.

"In one or more volumes?"

"In one volume. I have seen it in Celia's hand. Mr. Hardwick gave her a copy of it, bound in green morocco."

"Had Miss Mayfield any other friend than yourself?" Eustace asked, after a brief pause. "Was there any one else in whom she would have been likely to confide?"

"No one else. Society in Bayham is very limited. Mr. Mayfield was so wrapped up in his daughter, and had such high ideas, on account of being the son of a clergyman, that he scarcely thought any one good enough to associate with her. I was Celia's only female friend."

"I hope you will think more tenderly of her in future," said Eustace, gently; "she is now beyond all human praise or blame, and the turf will lie none the less lightly above her grave, let the world judge her never so harshly. But I who knew her and loved her, would like to think that the companion of her youth remembered her kindly."

A second solitary tear bedewed the eye of Mrs. Willows.

"I 'm sure I bear no malice," she said, in an injured tone.

"If Celia and I were at variance for some months before she left, it was more her fault than mine, for I gave her the best advice, and gave it with the best intentions. But I am quite willing to forget all that. Do you know if the gentleman who called himself Mr. Hardwick really did marry her? People in Bayham concluded, by her not coming back, that she was altogether deceived and deluded by his fine promises; and it was said her father's heart was broken by her conduct. He died very soon after, as you may be aware; and his wife did not long survive him."

"I know very little of your friend's sad story," answered Eustace; "but I know that her life for twenty years was as pure as the life of an angel—as self-denying as that of a saint."

There was no more to be said. Eustace thanked Mrs. Willows for her compliance with his wishes, and took his departure. He went out into the High Street of Bayham very little wiser than when he had entered the prosperous emporium of Kimber and Willows. He walked slowly along the quiet street, and found himself by and by on the outskirts of the town, strolling onward in an objectless manner, and meditating upon his mother's broken story.

When he paused for the first time to look about him he was face to face with the sea. Behind him a terrace of white houses reflected the full blaze of the southern sun. Before him lay the bay—a wide expanse of tawny sand, with pools of sunlit water glimmering here and there.

The tide was low, and the sandy amphitheatre lay open to the foot of the pedestrian. On one side of the bay rose a tall cliff; on the other a stretch of sand lay beyond the jutting line of rocks. Eustace crossed the bay in this direction. He wanted to see the place in which Celia Mayfield had walked with her false lover, and he knew that this lonely stretch of sand beyond the rocks must be the spot alluded to in his father's letters, and mentioned that day by Mrs. Willows.

It was a fit spot for a lovers' trysting-place—remote from the voices of the little town, and yet within the sound of church-bells, which took a silvery tone as they floated hitherward across the rippling water. Summer visitors to Bayham rarely penetrated beyond the screen of rocks which sheltered the bay, and this smooth stretch of sand was not often invaded by the spades and barrows of noisy children or the feet of idle damsels. It was an enchanted cove, which might have been sacred to the sea-nymphs, so seldom did human creatures disturb its poetic calm.

Here Eustace lingered for some time, still meditating the story of his mother's youth, and with strangely intermingled feelings

of tenderness and anger in his heart. How could he ever think of *her* with sufficient love and pity? How could he ever think of her destroyer without considering how he should avenge her wrongs?

"So trusting, so childlike, and deceived so cruelly! What a villain he must have been! what an unutterable villain!" thought Celia's son, as he contemplated the scene of his mother's love-story. It should have been such a sweet idyll—a modern fairy tale of rustic beauty and princely truth and chivalry—and it had been instead so dark a history of falsehood and shame.

The sun was low in the west when Eustace left that lonely sea-shore. He had been walking there for hours, indifferent alike to the progress of time and to the fact that he had eaten nothing since nine o'clock that morning. And after leaving the sands he did not return immediately to his hotel, but made his way to the parish churchyard, guided by the old Norman tower, which stood out in sombre relief against a rosy evening sky. There was just light enough to serve him in his search amongst the tombstones; nor was he long in finding that which he sought—a tall, white head-stone, standing near the low wall which bounded the crowded burial-place. The churchyard stood on rising ground; and the irregular roofs and chimneys of the town, with here and there a glimpse of foliage, and the broad purple sea for a background, made no unlovely picture in the soft evening light.

Eustace knelt upon the grass beside the simple grave, and in that pious attitude read the inscription on the head-stone:

Sacred to the Memory
OF
EUSTACE THORBURN MAYFIELD,
YOUNGEST SON OF THE LATE SAMUEL MAYFIELD, CURATE OF ASHE, IN THIS COUNTY,
Obiit April 3, 1846, ætat. 52;
AND OF
MARY CELIA,
HIS WIDOW, SECOND DAUGHTER OF THE LATE MR. JAMES HOWDEN, FARMER,
Obiit February 1, 1847, ætat. 49.
This stone is erected by their affectionate children.

"Have I any right to think of them as my grandfather and my grandmother?" the young man asked himself. "The law would tell me no. But I take my stand upon a higher law than that made by political economists, and claim the right to call these my kindred, and to avenge their injuries."

CHAPTER VII.

MR JERNINGHAM'S GUEST.

THEODORE DE BERGERAC and Harold Jerningham were friends of thirty years' standing. There was some distant relationship between them—some remote cousinship arising from the marriage of an exiled Jerningham of Jacobite principles with a De Bergerac, in the reign of George the Second. But this inscrutable cousinship had nothing to do with the friendship between the two men. *That* was a sincere and spontaneous affection, such as exists now and then between two people as different from each other as it is possible for creatures of the same species to be. Harold was ten years younger than his friend in actual years, and his senior by a century in all qualities of heart and mind. The elder man retained the freshness and simplicity of a child at sixty years of age; the younger had parted with every attribute of youth before the advent of his twenty-fifth birthday. Both were highly gifted: but one had scattered the treasures of intellect on every road, and wasted the powers of his brain in a hundred ignoble pursuits; while the other had enriched his mind unconsciously in the calm seclusion of a scholar's retreat. An angel might have read the innermost secrets of Theodore de Bergerac's heart, and would have found therein no taint of earthly grossness; but there had been times when devils might have rejoiced in the thoughts of Harold Jerningham. And yet the two men were friends, and had preserved an unbroken friendship for nearly thirty years. A Philip of Orleans, steeped to the very lips in the poisonous teaching of a Dubois, will in the hour of his deepest degradation respect the purity of childhood. Before the stainless robes of perfect innocence the most hardened profligate bows his head and covers his face, ashamed of the vices he is wont to be proud of—softened, melted, vanquished by that invincible purity. Thus it had been with Harold Jerningham. For this world-weary, hardened sinner the simple-minded scholar was sacred as a child. De Bergerac knew nothing of that Jerningham of the bachelor's house in Park Lane: Jerningham the irresistible, the man who was an exile from the houses of careful fathers and devoted husbands; the man whose life would have furnished subject-matter for half a dozen romances and more than one tragedy. When Harold Jerningham entered his friend's house he put away the baser half of himself. A little cynical, a little bitter, a little hard and worldly he must needs be, even in that innocent society; but Jerningham the free-thinker and the profligate melted into thin air on the threshold of Theodore de Bergerac's dwelling.

The two friends did not meet very often, though the house

which Theodore de Bergerac had occupied ever since his first coming to England stood on the border of Mr. Jerningham's park in Berkshire,—a grand old park, in the midst of which there was a great house that had once been splendid, but about which there was now a certain air of shabbiness and decay. How should a mansion preserve its warmth and grandeur when the master crossed its threshold so rarely, and during his brief visits preferred a couple of dingy chambers on the ground-floor to that spacious suite of apartments, with panelled walls and painted ceilings, in which his forefathers had held their state?

M. de Bergerac was a warm partizan of the Orleans family, and in the revolution of '48 had turned his back upon his father's country. He had come straight to England, where he had found a fair young English wife in the person of a Berkshire curate's eldest daughter, and had accepted the hospitality of his friend, Mr. Jerningham, so far as to occupy an old-fashioned farm-house on the borders of the park—a house which had been built for a bailiff in the days of some departed Jerningham, but which had long fallen into disuse. Harold would fain have persuaded the exile to take up his quarters in the big house, with all the lazy, over-fed retainers at his disposal; but De Bergerac ridiculed his friend's offer.

"What should I do with your thirty bed-chambers," he wrote in answer to Harold's letter of invitation, "and your great corridors, along which one could drive a coach-and-pair, and your housekeeper in a stiff silk gown, and all your grooms and hangers-on? I would as soon live in the palace of Versailles. Even kings and queens grow tired of their palaces, you will perceive; and the man who has sunk millions in the creation of a Versailles must needs seek domestic comfort at Marly. You cannot endure your howling wilderness yourself,—you, who have been accustomed to splendid habitations,—and yet ask me to take up my abode in your thirty bed-chambers, and abandon myself to the tyranny of your awful housekeeper. No, my dear Jerningham; give me the little Trianon—that tumble-down old farm-house you showed me last year, in the midst of a quaint Dutch flower-garden—and I shall be happy. All I want is a room big enough and dry enough to hold my books, and I will not envy your gracious Queen her pompous chateau at Windsor."

So the scholar and lover of books came to the farm-house, which Harold Jerningham had taken care to make weather-tight and snug before the exile's arrival. De Bergerac recognized the handiwork of his friend in the arrangement of this comfortable English hermitage. There were a few rare old Dutch pictures, a small head by Holbein, a highly-finished little bit by Canaletti, hanging in the oak-panelled parlour, which no

farm-bailiff had been privileged to gaze upon. There were quaint little inlaid cabinets between the windows, with that delightful shabbiness of aspect and mellow depth of tint which distinguishes the treasures of Christie and Manson's sale-room from the glaring freshness of modern marqueterie. And on the cabinets were fragile odds and ends of Derby and Worcester, Chelsea and Battersea, intermingled with those dingy-looking bronzes and intaglios which the soul of the collector loveth. And the biggest room in the old farm-house, once a kitchen, had been lined from floor to ceiling with carved oaken shelves, for the reception of the new-comer's library; while the great yawning fireplace, in which hinds and shepherds had supped their evening ale, and roasted their sturdy legs, in the days that were gone, was now lined with encaustic tiles, and furnished with a modern-antique grate of black iron-work and glittering steel. When Harold Jerningham was pleased to be generous, he obeyed his impulses in a princely fashion. He was not a good man; but his vices and virtues were alike of the *vieille roche*, and were instinct with a kind of dignity. Let Lucifer fall never so low, he is the prince of devils still, and will show himself grander in his debasement than fiends of meaner rank.

The country people in the neighbourhood of Greenlands were ready to receive M. de Bergerac with open arms: but he did not often avail himself of their friendly hospitality. He was serenely happy among his books and manuscripts, in the chamber which his friend had beautified for him, and had no thought of seeking any other kind of happiness. The great scheme of his life, the very beginning and end of his existence, was the completion of a book which was to supply an existing void in the world of books. To this achievement he devoted his days and nights, choosing all his reading with reference to his one great scheme. The subject possessed unfailing fascination for the mind of the scholar. It was an inexhaustible quarry, rich with gems of purest water; and De Bergerac dug patiently for the precious jewels, content to let the years slip past him unmarked, save by the slow growth of his mighty treatise. When the work seemed ripening, and the hour of its completion near at hand, the scholar trembled, for he remembered Gibbon's walk in the moonlit garden at Lausanne, and the desolation which came down upon the worker when he felt that his task was finished. Happily, the hour of completion, which De Bergerac dreaded, was very slow to come. There was an end to the history of ancient Rome; but it appeared, at times, as if there could be no end to the history of superstition.

The exile had passed his fortieth birthday, and had been but six months in England, when he married a fair young English girl—in a fit of absence of mind, said the ignorant, who tried to

account for this unexpected alliance. But Harold Jerningham fathomed the secret of his friend's marriage. The girl was the daughter of a curate, an old Orientalist, of whose reading De Bergerac had gladly availed himself for his beloved work, and in whose pleasant cottage he had therefore been a constant visitor. The curate's daughter had been charmed out of the dullness of her life by the society of the courteous exile; and from looking up to him with reverential tenderness as a mentor and friend, she had unconsciously grown to regard him with a deeper and more tender feeling than that gentle, womanly friendship. A tone, a look, an imperceptible something not to be defined by words, revealed this feeling to De Bergerac before the girl was fully aware of it herself; and could he be less than grateful, this exile of forty? could his own heart fail to yield to so insidious and innocent an attack? Hence arose this marriage, which was so great a wonder to those who had only a superficial knowledge of the Frenchman's character.

It was a union of perfect happiness. M. de Bergerac's modest income was more than enough for the Arcadian existence which he and his young wife led in the Berkshire farmhouse. The curate's daughter was country-bred, and was a fitting mistress for such an establishment. She brought the garden to the rarest perfection of floricultural beauty, and she distinguished herself by the administration of a wonderful poultry-yard. She was as happy as the summer day was long among her simple duties; while he, who in her eyes appeared the greatest of human scholars and the most adorable of men, sat alone in the sacred chamber, which she entered always with subdued footsteps, as if it had been a religious temple. It was her pride and delight to be useful to the man she loved. She worked for him, and managed for him, and hoarded for him; and he found himself all the richer, even in the matter of sordid cash, for her sweet companionship. The student, looking up from his books and manuscripts, beheld cows grazing in the rich meadow before his window, and was told that the cows were his, and that the produce of those stupid creatures could be transformed into money, with which rare old black-letter volumes and manuscripts of unspeakable value could be bought in London sale-rooms.

For seven years Theodore de Bergerac tasted the perfection of calm domestic happiness, and then the cup was snatched away from him. The bright face faded; the indefatigable housewife was fain to rest from her beloved labours. Little by little the bitter truth—which at first seemed almost an impossibility—came home to the stricken heart of the husband, and he knew that he was doomed to survive his young wife. The dreaded hour came, and she left him—very lonely without her, but, hap-

pily, not quite alone. She left one little girl—a fairer and brighter likeness of herself; and upon this young life the widower set his hopes of earthly happiness.

It was only natural that his unfinished book should become so much the dearer to him by reason of this great human sorrow. The stricken heart refused all comfort, but the agonized mind sought to beguile itself into forgetfulness of pain. The student went back to his books, and buried himself more deeply than of old amidst the ruins and ashes of the past. His days were spent at his desk. His soul, sorely stricken in this lower world of hard realities, wandered away and lost itself in the infinite regions of mythic poetry. As the years crept past him unawares, and his daughter blossomed into early womanhood, and the same bright face peeped in again at his window which had shone upon him in the brief happiness of his married life, it almost seemed to him as if that terrible anguish, that desolating loss, had been no more than a dreadful dream.

To this man's quiet home Harold Jerningham came sometimes as to a haven of shelter. He was wont to drop in upon the modest Berkshire household unexpectedly, with the bronze of an Oriental sun still upon his face, or a fur coat, in which he had travelled from St. Petersburg, hanging loosely on his arm. He came hither for rest, for a brief interval of repose from "the fever called living;" and it was here, in the house that had been built for his great-grandfather's bailiff, that the owner of three country seats and an almost inexhaustible revenue, found the nearest approach to happiness which he had experienced during the last twenty years.

Eustace Thorburn's arrangements for beginning his new life were of the simplest order. He found a letter from M. de Bergerac waiting for him on his return to London—such a letter as only a gentleman can write—a letter which placed the secretary at once on the footing of a friend, and gave him promise of friendly welcome.

The young man spent the last night of his stay in London with Daniel Mayfield. The uncle and nephew dined together at one of those snug little haunts which the literary Bohemian affected, and Daniel's soul expanded under the influence of Chambertin at nine shillings a bottle. He had received a cheque in payment of his latest Massacre of the Innocents in the way of reviewing, and it was in vain that Eustace tried to arrest his extravagant orders.

"The best you can do for us in the shape of dinner, Tom," he said to the waiter, with whom he was on the familiar terms of an *habitué;* "and—let me see the wine-card: yes, Dancer sticks to his old prices, I perceive. What nethermost circle can that man expect to inhabit in the under world, I wonder?

Johannisberg with the oysters, Tom: if you were well up in your Charles de Bernard, you would be aware that Chablis is the mistake of the half-educated diner. After the soup you may give us a bottle of the old Madeira—*the* Madeira, remember—no modern French concoction, flavoured with burnt-sugar. We will not go into sparkling, Tom—sparkling is the luxury of the vulgar; wines that leap and bubble are the pet delusion of the *oi polloi;* we will therefore confine ourselves to the borders of the Rhine. If your still Moselle is worthy of a gentleman's attention, you may bring us a bottle. The Chambertin I know to be tolerable; so after dinner we will stick to *that.*"

Never before had Daniel Mayfield introduced his sister's son to any of the haunts in which the best hours of his own careless life had been wasted. The young man was as temperate as a girl, and the dinner-giver had his carefully chosen wines to himself. But as Mayfield grew gay and eloquent with the warming influence of the Burgundian hillside, Eustace Thorburn's spirits rose in sympathy with his companion. For there is a subtle influence in wine which communicates itself to the man who does not drink as well as to the man who does; and he must be slow and dull of soul who can sit amongst the worshippers o Bacchus and not feel the fiery presence of the god, let his own beverage be no stronger than water.

"I have never brought you here before, and I should not have brought you here to-night, Eustace," said Daniel, and he passed his newly filled glass of Burgundy beneath his nostrils, with the gesture of a connoisseur; "I should not have brought you here to-night, my lad, pleasant though it is to me to see your bright face across the rosy vapour of the South, if you and I were not going to part company. This is Bohemia, Eustace—the land in which jolly good fellows go to the dogs in their own jolly way—and I'm not quite certain that it's the worst way a man can travel to his ruin. We spend our money, and we live in fear of sheriff's officers, and we die in sponging-houses; but, after all, we escape many of the heartburnings which your very respectable people suffer. We are no shams—we live our own lives; and are ourselves alone—no phantasmal simulacra of other men. We take existence lightly—share our own good fortune with our needy brothers—and envy no man his luck. But if you have poetic aspirations and noble ambitions, if you want to be a great and a good man, keep clear of us—no great man ever issued from our ranks. We have talent, we have sometimes even genius; but we never achieve. Jones is of the stuff that makes a noble historian; but Jones must have his night in his pet tavern, and a five-pound note at the service of the Pythias of the hour; so he writes showy essays for the magazines. Smith turns his unfinished picture to the wall, in the hour when he was budding

into a Rubens, to paint pot-boilers for the fashionable dealers—a young man and woman in a boat off Twickenham, with spinachy foliage and a flimsy blue sky, spotted with little ragged dabs of the palette-knife; or a girl in a striped petticoat playing croquet against a background in which you may count the threads of the canvas. Browne might write a comedy which would remind the critics of Sheridan; but he cannot afford to polish the graceful turns of his dialogue or study the unity of his design, so he does a bad adaptation of a bad French vaudeville, and gets twenty pounds down on the nail for his labour. We possess the elements of greatness; but we can't wait—we want ready money. The man with a wife and seven children may struggle out of poverty into greatness; but for the jolly good-fellow, with half a dozen boon-companions, enduring success is an impossibility."

Eustace had never before heard his uncle speak so seriously of himself and his own set.

"You may do great things yet, Uncle Dan," he said, earnestly; "let me give up this Berkshire engagement, and stop in town to work with you. Cut all the boon-companions, and let us go in earnestly for honest hard work. I want to see your name allied to some perfect book; your talent gets frittered away upon anonymous reviews and essays. Oliver Goldsmith wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and you know he was something of a Bohemian."

"He was a Bohemian, who lived among such men as Johnson and Burke and Reynolds," answered Daniel; "Bohemia has degenerated since those days. And how many more stories, as perfect as the *Vicar of Wakefield*, might *not* simple-hearted Noll have written if he had not been something of a Bohemian! Your great workers are jog-trot stay-at-home creatures. William Shakespeare was a respectable citizen, who saved money, and settled himself comfortably in his native town before he was my age, and sued his friend for a trifling debt, and made a will in which his domestic carefulness reveals itself by allusions to bedsteads and such-like household furniture; whereby you may perceive the legendary character of all popular records of the poet's youth, for the man who began life by stealing deer and holding horses would never have developed into the bequeather of bedsteads. So no more, lad; I shall hide my light in anonymous essays and reviews as long as I live, for I shall always be in want of ready money."

"Unless I can make a fortune big enough for us both, Uncle Dan," said the young man, hopefully. At three-and-twenty one fancies it such an easy thing to make a fortune. All the high-roads to the temple of fame radiate before the feet of youth, and it seems a mere matter of choice whether one is to be Shakespeare or Bacon.

"If you make the fortune of a Rothschild or a Pereira, you would never make me a rich man," cried Daniel. "Turn the waters of the Pactolus into my pocket to-day, and before a month is out there will not be left one vestige of the golden river. If I were a second Midas, endowed with the power of changing vulgar wooden chairs and tables into so much solid gold, my friends and companions and the tavern-keepers would take the chairs and tables, and leave me a pauper. I must go my own way, dear boy; and the further my road lies from yours the better for you. Let me hear from you sometimes; and even if your letters are left unanswered, think that they are carried in the pocket nearest your Daniel's heart, and that they are his consolation when the world goes ill with him."

CHAPTER VIII.

GREENLANDS.

It was the drowsiest hour of a drowsy August afternoon when Eustace Thorburn made his way on foot from the Windsor terminus to the bailiff's house at Greenlands. He had put his luggage into a great lumbering fly, which was to crawl after him to his destination; and he went on foot through the rich pastoral country, with the grandest castle in the world looming upon him at every turn, in all its proud array of battlemented tower and terrace, keep and chapel. He went to begin his new life, and the country through which he went seemed to him more beautiful than his dreams of Paradise. Remember that he had newly come from the sandy flats of Flemish Flanders, and that the fairest landscape he had beheld of late was a row of lindens sheltering a sluggish canal, and a herd of cattle browsing upon sunburnt table-lands. The shadow of a bitter grief was about and around him, and all the sunlight and beauty of the outer world seemed very dim and remote to him—something fair and beautiful in which he had no actual part, like a picture seen from afar off. But the influence of all this outward loveliness penetrated to his poor desolate heart, and warmed and melted it. His thoughts amidst these woods and pastures could never be so bitter, it seemed to him, as they had been in the stony quadrangle at Villebrumeuse. He thought of his mother as he walked slowly along the quiet roads and byways; but he no longer brooded gloomily upon her wrongs on earth as he had been wont to brood. He fancied her happy in heaven.

His way to Greenlands led him by the low meads athwart which the Thames winds like a silver ribbon, for the great

neglected park of which Harold Jerningham was owner lay on the border of that delicious river. The way was very lonely, and somewhat intricate. Eustace had occasion to stop at more than one cottage door, and to ask his way of more than one rosy-faced rustic matron, who came from her wash-tub to answer his inquiries, sometimes accompanied by a toddling child, that peered curiously at the stranger from between the lattice-work of a garden-gate. The way was long and lonely; but at last, when the sun was low, the pedestrian came to a gate in a stout oak fence, and knew that he was on the threshold of Harold Jerningham's domain. The gate was unlocked, as the country people had told Eustace that it would be. The gate opened into the wildest region of the park; but at the end of a deep glade the traveller saw the great red-brick mansion, massive and stately, on the summit of a grassy slope.

"A noble domain," he thought, as he stopped to contemplate the scene before him. "Perhaps the heir to it is a young man with a father who is prouder of him than of lands or houses, or wealth or name. I can fancy the festivities and rejoicings when *he* came of age. There were great tents on the lawn yonder, I daresay, and oxen roasted whole, and monster casks of ale set running."

Eustace Thorburn's imagination filled in all the details of that possible picture. He could see that imaginary heir walking slowly through a joyous crowd, with his arm linked in his father's. It was upon the image of that father the young man's mind dwelt with a strange melancholy yearning, half sorrow, half bitterness. How the proud face softened into tenderness, and the eyes grew dim with tears, as the father listened to the shouts and clamour of an admiring throng! This fatherless young man could so vividly imagine the love which must exist between a father and his son. Perhaps he imagined some more exalted feeling than ever did exist in human breasts. Perhaps he exaggerated the joys of such an affection; as the parched traveller in the desert may imagine unutterable deliciousness in a draught of the water that is spilt and wasted by heedless hands at the public fountain of a city.

As the traveller drew near to the red-brick mansion the vision of the possible festivity melted away, for he saw that no festival could have been celebrated in that place for many a year gone by. The palace of the Sleeping Beauty, buried deep in the innermost recesses of a forest, and forgotten by waking mankind, could have scarcely been more lonely or neglected of aspect than this old Berkshire mansion. The rabbits frisked across the young man's pathway as he went through the shadowy arcades, and the golden plumage of a pheasant glimmered here and there among the fern and underwood. Every-

where there was neglect and decay. The grass grew long and rank, and even in the gardens, where the handiwork of the gardener was visible, and where Eustace saw two feeble old men mowing the grass, it was evident that the work was only half done.

The path which Eustace had been directed to take led him past the gardens, which were only divided by an invisible fence from the park. He could have gone to the bailiff's house by the high-road had he chosen; but this short-cut across the park saved him nearly a mile, and was a pleasanter way. To Eustace it was unspeakably delightful. The solemn quiet of the place imparted a new charm to its natural loveliness. A turn in the path brought him presently upon a wide expanse of smooth turf, shadowed here and there by great oaks and beeches, and across this wooded lawn he saw the river, gleaming bright and blue, athwart a fringe of trembling rushes. He paused for a few moments, transfixed by the tranquil loveliness of this English landscape, steeped in the rosy light of a summer evening.

"I suppose the owner of the place is a poor man, who cannot afford to occupy it," he thought; whereby it may be seen how a stranger, who judges by appearances, is likely to form a false conclusion.

Eustace Thorburn was ready to bestow his compassion upon the man who was lord of this enchanting domain, and yet unable to enjoy its loveliness.

The gray walls and red-tiled roof of the bailiff's house appeared between two masses of foliage as he drew near the border of the park. It was a house with many gables and great stacks of rickety-looking chimneys. Such a house as inspires contempt in the mind of a practical modern architect, by reason of the space that is frittered away on unnecessary passages, and little bits of rooms too small and dark for any civilized inhabitant, and ghastly cupboards in unsuspected places. It was a house in whose ample cellarage a gang of burglars might have lain perdu for a week, without the family being made aware of their presence. It was a house in which one could hardly retire to rest without expecting to see a pair of appalling Eyes staring at one through a crevice in the panelling, or two dreadful Boots emerging from beneath the drapery of the bed. If furniture of the commonest fashion, and fresh from the upholsterer, takes to itself awful voices after midnight, and creaks and groans with dismal significance in a modern London habitation, as it will—witness universal experience—what might not be expected from old oak bureaus and Elizabethan arm-chairs in this gabled dwelling? The out-buildings and disused chambers had that damp, earthy odour, which is known to every imaginative mind

as the smell of ghosts; and that ubiquitous and nameless suicide, who seems to have hung himself or cut his throat at some remote date in every old house, had hung himself here, and made himself obnoxious to simple Berkshire maid-servants by those Cock-lane-like scrapings and tappings and rushings which the sternly commonplace mind is apt to attribute to rats.

This was the place to which Eustace Thorburn came in the rosy summer evening to begin his new life. The garden, which he entered by a low wooden gate, was the growth of a hundred and fifty years, and was as securely walled in by thick and high hedges of holly and yew as it could have been by the work of any mortal builder. The air was odorous with the perfume of bright English flowers; and as the stranger drew near the house he was greeted with such a burst of honest woodland music from the throats of blackbirds and thrushes, larks and linnets, as he never remembered to have heard in all his life before.

They were caged birds that sang so blithely, and their cages hung in the roomy wooden porch with a thatched roof, over which there was spread a curtain of flowering clematis and rich crimson-veined honeysuckle. Out of this dusky porch a great Newfoundland dog sprang at the intruder, awakening distant echoes by his deep-toned thunder. But a woman's voice, very sweet and melodious, as the young man thought, called from the cottage, "Down, Hephæstus!—quiet, boy; quiet!" Eustace wondered what kind of woman this could be who lived in the student's cottage and called her dog Hephæstus.

The Newfoundland crouched at the stranger's feet, obedient to the sound of that familiar voice; and then a man's footstep sounded in the porch, and Theodore de Bergerac came out to meet his secretary. Eustace had been too much occupied by bitter and sorrowful thoughts within the last week to puzzle himself by speculative ideas about his new employer; but of course he had some vague notion—unconsciously conceived—of what M. de Bergerac would be like, and the real M. de Bergerac was the very reverse of the shadowy creature of his imagining. There had been in his mind some faint picture of a little wizen old man, with a weird face and a black velvet skull-cap. Why a black velvet skull-cap he could not have said; but possibly that kind of head-gear is in a manner allied with the idea of extreme erudition and much consumption of midnight oil. He had fancied a frail, wasted creature, with long, straggling white hair falling in unkempt locks upon the greasy collar of a dressing-gown; and lo! the man who came to greet him was tall and stalwart, with a bright, frank face, which had once been very handsome, and was handsome still, and iron-gray hair arranged with scrupulous neatness. He walked rather lame,

and carried a cane with a head of oxidized silver, exquisitely modelled—a gem in its way, like all the surroundings of its possessor, who had the taste of a Bernard or a Bohn.

This was Theodore de Bergerac, the man who at sixty years of age retained the freshness and gaiety of six-and-twenty. The lameness from which he suffered had afflicted him for the last thirty years, for it was the result of a musket-wound received at the siege of Antwerp. The student had been a soldier in those days, and had done good service under the brave leader he loved so well.

M. de Bergerac greeted Eustace with friendly courtesy. He spoke the English language perfectly; and it was only by a certain delicate precision of pronunciation—a somewhat measured accent—and by an occasional Gallic locution that strangers discovered his nationality.

"Welcome to Greenlands, Mr. Thorburn. If you are fond of the country, I think you will love Berkshire. It has all the richness of southern France, and all the home-like comfort of Normandy. If we were a little nearer the sea, and could catch the breath of the ocean now and then from the summit of our hills, we should be in Paradise. But a man cannot expect to be *quite* in Paradise; and I suppose this is as near an approach to Eden as we can hope for upon earth. Have you dined? We live as people lived in French provincial towns when I was a boy; and our hours are as early as those of the country people round about us. I suppose in London the world is beginning to dress for dinner. We dined half a dozen hours ago; but I can promise you an excellent supper. My little *ménagère* has made arrangements for a perfect banquet in your honour."

Eustace wondered whether the little *ménagère* and the lady who called to the dog were one and the same person. It was very foolish of him to wish that it might be so, and to imagine that the person must needs be young and beautiful. But then poetical three-and-twenty is subject to such foolish wishes and imaginings.

Theodore de Bergerac and his secretary went into the house, where lights began to glimmer here and there in the dusk. The room into which the Frenchman led Eustace had that sweet rustic charm peculiar to country drawing-rooms; but the stranger fancied it had a certain harmonious beauty which he had never beheld in any other apartment. *Every* thing in it was beautiful. There were no false forms, no discordant tones lurking here and there to mar the harmony of the general effect. No pert young Cupid in Parian folded his mis-shapen wings, or uplifted his insolent pug nose before the outraged beholder—no hideous form of modern vase or flower-pot—no gaudy abomination of cheap Bohemian glass offended the eye; no impossible

roses and lilies in Berlin-wool and bead-work offered themselves as a flowery couch for the visitor's repose. A subdued harmony of form and colour pervaded every object. The valuable books scattered lavishly in every direction made no parade of their costliness. The rare old china needed examination before its beauty revealed itself. Everything was fresh and pure and delicate. There was a perfume of many flowers mingled with the subtle aroma of Russia-leather bindings, very pleasant to the stranger's nostrils. New though the place was to him, he had no sense of strangeness; he felt rather as if he had come home to some delicious and familiar resting-place for which he had long been yearning. Perhaps this feeling may have been a vague foreshadowing of his fate. Perhaps he had a faint semi-consciousness of the fact that perfect happiness was to come to him in that house.

The two men sat for some little time in the dimly-lighted room—lighted only by a pair of small wax candles in antique bronze candlesticks. They talked of many things, gliding imperceptibly from one subject to another without either jerks or pauses in the smooth current of talk. De Bergerac was a delightful talker—playful and serious, gay and earnest by turns—now childishly emphatic about trifles, now touching the profoundest subjects with a graceful lightness. Eustace was charmed by his new employer, and began to think that his lines had fallen in pleasant places.

He may have been still more inclined to think so a few minutes later, when a trim little maid-servant announced that supper was ready, and M. de Bergerac led him into the dining-room.

The dining-room was only an old-fashioned oak-panelled chamber, like the drawing-room; but the hands which had beautified the one had imparted the same air of grace and refinement to the other. There were more pictures and books and china, more fresh flowers in vases of dark-blue Wedgwood: and, above all, there was that sweet home-like aspect, which has a deeper charm than is to be imparted by the choicest treasures of art or the fairest gifts of nature. A small round table was laid for supper; and the bright colouring of a lobster, the tender green of a salad, the varied hues of some fruit piled high in a basket-shaped china dish, to say nothing of all the glitter and sparkle of rare old-fashioned glass and silver, or the amber and ruby of wines, made no uninviting picture under the mellow light of the lamp.

But there was a fairer picture to be seen in that chamber, which distracted the stranger's gaze from the hospitable preparations that had been made for him—the picture of a girl standing by a ponderous old easy-chair, with her white hands loosely

folded on the cushion, and with the great black Newfoundland dog at her feet.

In the course of his eventless life Eustace Thorburn had not seen many beautiful women, so it is a small thing to say that the girl he saw to-night seemed to him the loveliest creature he had ever beheld. The dark beauties of Villebrumeuse, rich in the southern graces of their Spanish ancestors, had flashed their black eyes upon the young Englishman sometimes, as he paced the quiet streets of their city, but had gone by unnoticed by him. It may have been that to-night his imagination was unusually exalted, his mind peculiarly prone to receive impressions, for it seemed to him as if he had passed out of the dull beaten tracks of every-day life into an enchanted region, a kind of Arcadian fairy-land, of which this beauteous creature was a fitting queen.

She was an honest English beauty, and the brightness of her complexion had ripened under an English sun. Her dark-blue eyes seemed darker and bluer by reason of the rosy bloom of her cheeks and the crimson of her perfect mouth. The dusky gold of her hair was no fictitious charm derived from the costly washes of a court perfumer. She was no spurious Venetian beauty, with locks of tawny red; but a fair English girl, fresh and bright as a woodland summer morning, pure as a flower with the dew upon its opening petals. Her white muslin dress was unrelieved by a trinket or a ribbon; but what need had she of colour or jewels, whose eyes were more brilliant than the rarest sapphires, whose lips were more precious than Neapolitan coral, and in whose innocent young beauty there was a brightness surpassing the radiance of earthly gems?

"My daughter," said M. de Bergerac; "my daughter Helen —Mr. Thorburn." Whereupon this enchanting creature greeted the stranger with a bright smile and some indistinct murmur of welcome. They seated themselves at the little supper-table presently, and this divine Helen looked on admiringly while her father carved a fore-quarter of lamb. It was a long time since Eustace had taken a hasty snack of luncheon with his uncle, before starting for Windsor, yet he had little appetite for that innocent Berkshire lamb. His gaze wandered from the contents of his plate to Helen de Bergerac's fair young face; and if he had been sharing the Barmecide's shadowy feast, he could scarcely have been more unconscious of the flavour of the viands or the aroma of the wines.

"Help yourself to some of that Medoc, Mr. Thorburn," said his host; "and be sure you do justice to my daughter's salad. Helen is a salad-maker whom Brillat Savarin might have approved. The salad is the *chef-d'œuvre* of amateur art. No hired cook ever yet excelled in the composition of a salad. The task is too delicate for a hand that has been soiled by wages."

Eustace blushed. Three-and-twenty is so painfully sensitive. Was he not going to take wages in that house? He stole a look at his host's daughter, and wondered whether she felt a patrician contempt for her father's secretary. She had the blood of Spanish grandees in her veins, despite her English beauty. Heaven knows what haughty hidalgo might have infused his pride into those azure veins.

"She is aptly named," thought the young man; "Helen, the destroyer of ships and of men. Helen, the daughter of Jupiter and Nemesis—for I will never believe that poor Leda was any more than the nurse of that fatal creature. Helen, the daughter of Nemesis—let me remember her parentage and beware of her."

He discovered one fact in relation to Mademoiselle de Bergerac before the evening was over, though he could only watch her furtively now and then while her father was talking. He discovered that the damsel's heart was already engaged, and that he who came to lay siege to it would have need of patience and constancy. She was in love with her father. She watched him with tender, reverential eyes, and listened to him as to the voice of an oracle. Once, when his hand lay on the arm of his chair, she lifted it gently to her lips. And in all this there was no taint of affectation. No dryad of those Berkshire woods could have been more innocently natural than this descendant of Spanish hidalgos. No consciousness of her loveliness and fascination disturbed her sweet serenity as she talked to her father's secretary. She talked to him of pastoral pleasures and pursuits, and he divined from her talk that her country life was very dear to her. Her father went to London very often, she told Eustace in the course of the evening, to buy books; and sometimes, but very rarely, took her with him.

"And then I see the shops," she said; and by the tone of subdued ecstasy with which she pronounced this word, Eustace discovered for the first time that she was mortal. "I am afraid you will despise me very much for liking to see the shops. Papa does. He thinks it is the most foolish thing in the world to be fond of standing on a crowded pavement to look at dresses and bonnets that one is never likely to have."

"Or to want," interposed M. de Bergerac, looking proudly at the girl's animated face. "What could a little girl who makes butter do with fine silk dresses? and she is able to make butter for Windsor market, this young lady, as well as she is able to read Greek," added the father, fondly.

Eustace watched the two faces with a pensive admiration. Here was that ideal father of whom he had dreamed so often; here was that pure and perfect love which he had fancied.

It was late before the little party separated, for M. de Ber-

gerac had a student's attachment to the quiet of midnight, and an absent-minded man's unconsciousness of the flight of time. The clock of some village church-tower, hidden away somewhere beyond the beeches and oaks of Greenlands, struck twelve half an hour before the Frenchman conducted Eustace to the room that had been prepared for him. It was only a rustic chamber, with lattice casements set deep in a wall of old-fashioned solidity. The white draperies were faintly perfumed with that odour of rose-leaves and lavender which is as the very breath of the country. The lattice was open, and there was a vase of flowers on the broad window-ledge. Eustace wondered who had arranged those flowers. Not the trim little maid-servant surely. *She* would have squeezed the tender blossoms into a tightly-packed circular bunch; while these were only a few loose half-budding roses nestling among cool green leaves.

The lattice was open, and the harvest-moon shone full and bright above the woods of which Harold Jerningham was master. Eustace stood at the open casement for some time after his host had left him. He stood there in the solemn stillness, looking out across those sombre masses of foliage towards the moonlit river—so difficult to believe in by this light as an earthly river, navigable by coal-barges, and instrumental in the turning of paper-mills. He looked out upon that landscape of semi-divine beauty, and thought with a half-contemptuous pity of the man who owned it. Theodore de Bergerac had talked of his friend during the varied course of that evening's conversation, and Eustace had discovered that the lord of Greenlands was a lonely and childless wanderer—a wanderer in first-class carriages, and a dweller in the most expensive caravanseries; but not the less homeless, and joyless, and purposeless—not the less a standing example of the worthlessness of earthly prosperity.

Eustace Thorburn, the nameless and fatherless, pitied this childless man. It was scarcely strange if he let the underwood grow wild in his park, and foul weeds lie thick upon his lake. For whom should he be careful, for whom should he adorn and beautify, for whose sake should he plant young trees, or cut new avenues in the woodland? For what purpose should he heap up riches, who knew not what strange hand was destined to gather them?

But the secretary did not brood long on the sorrowful fate of that unknown Harold Jerningham. A fairer image came between him and the moonlit park, and it bore the likeness of Helen de Bergerac.

"I waste my thoughts upon a girl's lovely face, when I ought to be thinking of the work that lies before me," the young man said to himself, in angry scorn of his weakness. "Let me remember why I am here, and keep my brain clear of my

employer's daughter, in order that I may be able to help him honestly with his book."

He slept soundly and sweetly, lulled by the faint rustling of the foliage and the far-away murmur of the river. But his slumbers were not dreamless. He thought he saw the old red-brick mansion all ablaze with light. Long rows of windows shone on the darkness of the night, joyous music was wafted from the open lattices, and an indistinguishable some one in a crowd, that seemed all confusion and clamour, told him the heir of Greenlands had come of age.

He woke to see the sunshine in his room, and to hear Helen de Bergerac singing a waltz of Verdi's; while the song-birds in the porch strained their melodious throats to the uttermost, in the endeavour to drown their mistress's music.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THEY PARTED.

In the earlier years of her loneliness, Mrs. Jerningham's efforts in the way of little dinners were generally crowned with success. Women liked to dine at the toy-villa, because they knew the most eligible men were to be met there. Men were pleased to accept Mrs. Jerningham's invitations, sure that at her house they would encounter none but handsome or agreeable women. She displayed a delightful tact in the selection of her society. She would invite a lovely inanity to sit at her table, as a beautiful object for the contemplation of her guests; but she would take care to balance her soulless divinity by some decent-looking woman with brains. If the Household-Brigade element threatened to preponderate, and there was reason to dread that the whole talk at dinner would be about the wonderful things "fellows" present, and other fellows absent, who were the intimate friends of those fellows, had done in the way of deer-stalking in the Trossachs, or salmon-fishing in Norway, during the last autumn, Mrs. Jerningham took care to leaven it, and would despatch an invitation to some popular littérateur or fashionable actor, some clever amateur, well up in all the art-gossip, or a gentlemanly young explorer, lately returned from Africa with the last ideas about the source of the Nile, and delightful serio-comic anecdotes about encounters with crocodiles and Abyssinian damsels.

The mistress of River Lawn made her parties pleasant at any cost of trouble to herself. Even the dragon that guarded the enchanted garden, in the shape of an elderly aunt, was a pleasant dragon, who dressed well, and could talk cleverly on occasion. And then the dinners were not those shadowy repasts which are

wont to be served in mansions where a lady reigns unassisted by masculine counsel. Mrs. Colton, the elderly aunt, had entertained archbishops in her day, and knew how to compose a *menu*. The wines that sparkled into brightness under the light of beauty's eye at Mrs. Jerningham's table were supplied by Mr. Jerningham's own wine-merchant, who would not have dared to impose on the lady's possible innocence.

The house was very agreeable. That slight accident of Mr. Desmond's perpetual presence was only an additional advantage for people who wanted to beg favours from the fashionable editor —a good word for a new book, or a new play, or a new picture. It had become an established fact, that wherever Mrs. Jerningham appeared, Laurence Desmond was to appear also. His chosen friends gathered round her, like the knightly circle about a queen in the days when there was chivalry in the land, and a queen was a sacred creature. It was he who had brought that agreeable circle to River Lawn; how could a poor lonely woman have beguiled the shining lights of the crack London clubs to illuminate her dinner-table? It was Desmond who kept a strict account of her feminine acquaintance, watchful lest the faintest shadow in the reputation of a friend should be reflected on her. The editor of the *Areopagus* knew everything and everybody. The inner mysteries of Belgravia and Tyburnia, which outsiders discussed in solemn whispers and with awful shrugs, were stale and hackneyed facts for him. He knew that Emily Jerningham paid a certain price for his friendship—pure and chivalrous though that friendship might be—and that she must continue to pay it to the end. She had been very friendless immediately after her separation from her husband; and when the tide of public opinion was at its flood, ready to turn either way, it was Laurence's subtle influence which had set it flowing pleasantly for her. But he knew that his friendship cost her a price, notwithstanding. There was the savour of patronage in the friendliness of the people he had won to be her intimates. Spotless dowagers visited her and received her; but they were apt to affect a sort of pitying kindness when they spoke of her to other intimates. She was "that poor Mrs. Jerningham, who is separated from her husband, you know, my dear—Harold Jerningham, a dreadful person, I believe, though very nice in society. She lives with a widowed aunt, at the sweetest place, near Hampton, and gives charming parties; highly correct and proper in every way; and, you know, I think it a kind of duty to take notice of a woman in that position, when nothing can be said to her prejudice;" and so on, and so on, with inexhaustible variations on the perpetual theme. Laurence Desmond had heard the stereotyped talk a hundred times, and the recollection of it stung him to the very quick, when he thought of it in re-

lation to the woman whom he could remember a girl of seventeen, dressed in white, and walking by his side in a little garden at Passy.

Yes, he had known Emily Jerningham before she became the wife of her wealthy kinsman: he had known her in the days of her genteel poverty—the patient daughter of a peevish valetudinarian. He had been allied with this poorer branch of the Jerningham family by friendships and associations of many years' standing, and had never spent a week in Paris without paying more than one visit to the shabby little furnished-house at Passy, in which Philip Jerningham dragged out the tiresome remnant of his useless existence with Emily for his companion and nurse, his secretary, butler, and steward. He had come at first prompted by a kindly feeling for the friend of his dead father; he came afterwards for his own pleasure; and those flying visits to Paris, which had been wont to occur two or three times in the year, began to repeat themselves at very short intervals.

He had fallen in love with Emily Jerningham, and he had sufficient reason for believing that his love was returned. Those evenings in the little flower-garden at Passy were the happiest hours of his busy life. The paradise was very prim and dusty and arid, and all the roar and clamour of Paris thundered a hoarse chorus in the distance; but it was Eden, nevertheless; and when, a few years afterwards, he wasted an idle hour by going to look at the old place, he was surprised to discover what a shabby scene it was, now that the glamour had departed from it.

He was a proud man, and it was his misfortune to live in a world in which the splendour and luxuries of the million were accounted the necessities of existence. The women he met were women who would have been panic-stricken if they had found themselves on foot and alone in a crowded London street. They were women who, if suddenly reduced to the depths of poverty, would have thought the delf-plates and mugs of destitution a greater hardship than its bread and water. They were delicate creatures—"not too bright or good for human nature's daily food," but quite unable to cope with human nature's pecuniary embarrassments. They were creatures who thought that a cheque-book went on for ever, like the Laureate's brook: and that so long as there were any of those nice oblong slips of paper left in the world, papas and husbands and brothers had nothing to do but to sign their names at the bottom of them.

Laurence Desmond intended to ask Miss Jerningham to be his wife, but he was determined not to marry until he was secure of something like fifteen hundred a year. He reckoned his future expenditure sometimes as he meditated by his bachelor hearth, with a cigar between his lips. Two hundred a year for

a house somewhere within reasonable distance of the Park; a hundred for his wife's dress, fifty for his own; a miniature brougham would be rather a tight squeeze at a hundred and fifty; his own expenses, cigars, diplomatic dinners given at his club, cab-hire, books and newspapers, say two hundred more; and the remaining eight hundred for the vulgar necessities of everyday existence. Mr. Desmond mapped out his future very pleasantly for himself and the woman he loved; but in those days he was yet very far from the possession of the indispensable fifteen hundred. So he held his peace in the little flower-garden at Passy, and was content to talk agreeable nonsense to Emily Jerningham, while the poor little fountain trickled and dripped in the sunshine, and the gaudy red geraniums in the plaster vases on the wall made patches of vivid colour against the hot blue sky, and that hoarse chorus of Paris sounded its perpetual accompaniment—the roar of wheels and the rattle of vehicles, the tinkling of bells, the jingling of spoons and glasses on the pavement outside the coffee-houses, and the voices of the excited million, all blended into one indistinguishable clamour, rising and falling like the waves of a distant sea.

Mr. Desmond waited, satisfied with his prospects, content to abide the ripening of his fortunes, and convinced that good feeling and policy alike were involved in patience. Unhappily, the man who plans his own life is like a chess-player in London matched against a chess-player in Paris, and with *no* telegraphic communications of his adversary's moves. His theory of the game is perfect. His plan of action is decided upon with the cool deliberation of an accomplished strategist. He sees his way to the very end of the encounter: his castle there, his bishop here, his queen in the centre of the board, and—lo, his enemy is checkmated! But that hidden player in Paris adopts unimaginable tactics; and suddenly, after one never-to-be-expected move, the player in London finds himself ignominiously beaten.

While Laurence Desmond was dreaming lazily of the future, lingering over his midnight cigar in Temple chambers—nearer the chimney-pots than the handsome rooms he afterwards occupied—Philip Jerningham took it into his head to die suddenly, and Emily came to London with a letter to her cousin ever-so-many-times-removed, the irresistible Harold. By one of those insignificant accidents which make the links in the great chain of destiny, it happened that the announcement of Philip Jerningham's death escaped the eye of Emily's undeclared admirer. It was not to be expected that a bereaved daughter, who was left very desolate and helpless, could write ceremonious notes to all her late father's masculine acquaintance; and Emily had the Jerningham pride, and, for some unknown reason, was peculiarly inclined to be resentful of small offences where Laurence Des-

mond was concerned. So the editor went on smoking his midnight cigars, and pushing on steadily towards the achievement of the indispensable income; deferring week after week and month after month the Parisian holiday which he was always promising himself.

The time drifted by him with that imperceptible progress which is so peculiar to time when a man is always wrestling with the arrears of his labour, and trying to get seventy minutes out of an hour. Time puts on a special pair of wings for the slave who fills a waste-paper basket and uses half-a-crown's worth of postage-stamps every day of his life except Sunday, and who sits under a popular preacher on that day, weighed down by the consciousness of a hundred unanswered letters, and the knowledge that a hundred offended correspondents are swelling with indignation because of his neglect.

Mr. Desmond was roughly awakened from his pleasant day-dreams one morning on reading the announcement of Harold Jerningham's marriage. The blow was a severe one, and for some days the writer's arguments were rather weak and inconsequential, and the editor's eye unusually careless of flaws and blemishes in the work of his contributors. Only now that Emily was lost to him did he know how very dear she had been; but even more bitter to Laurence Desmond than the thought of his loss was the idea of his folly.

"I fancy myself a man of the world," he said to himself, "and yet I am the dupe of masculine fatuity which would be contemptible in a stripling newly escaped from the university. I thought she loved me; I thought her love was as entirely my own as if I had received the assurance of it in the plainest words that were ever spoken."

The idea that he had been duped by his own vanity stung him to the quick. He studiously avoided the places in which he was likely to encounter Emily Jerningham, and it was not until a year after her marriage that he met her. He came upon her suddenly one bright autumn day in an obscure foreign picture-gallery. For years after that day he was able to recall the scene of their unexpected meeting—the quaint old chamber in the courtyard of an hospital, the grim pre-Raphaelite pictures of unpleasant martyrdoms, the dusty motes dancing in the sunlight, and the listless grace of a woman who stood with her back towards him, leaning on the top rail of a chair, with an open catalogue held loosely in her hand. There was no one but this woman in the gallery. The door banged behind Mr. Desmond as he went in, and startled by the noise, she turned and looked at him.

This is how he met Emily Jerningham. The white change in her face told him that he had not been the dupe of a delusion

when he fancied himself beloved. He felt that he must be something more than a common acquaintance to the woman who looked at him with that pale, terror-stricken face. For a moment he feared that Mrs. Jerningham would faint; but the fear was groundless. She belonged to a class in which the women have some touch of the Roman's grandeur mingled with the sensuous softness of the Greek. The colour came back to her cheeks and lips in a few moments, and she held out her hand to her dead father's friend.

"How do you do, Mr. Desmond?" she said. "I did not know that you were in Germany."

"No. I am taking a brief holiday. Is Mr. Jerningham with you?"

"Yes; he had letters to write this morning, and sent me to explore this curious old hospital by myself. Do you stay long here?"

"I go on to Vienna this evening."

The beautiful face grew pale again. Mrs. Jerningham looked at her catalogue.

"I think I have seen all the pictures," she said. "My guide has gone to look for the key of some mysterious chamber; I must go in search of him. Good morning, Mr. Desmond. Oh, here is my husband!"

Mr. Jerningham sauntered into the gallery.

"I couldn't stand any more letter-writing, so I came to see your pictures, Emily," he said. "Ah, Desmond, how do you do? What brings you to this queer old place, so completely out of the beaten track—almost beyond the ken of *Murray?* You know my wife? Ah, I remember; your father and her father were great cronies. How is it you never told me you knew Desmond, Emily?"

Mrs. Jerningham's reply was only a vague murmur; but her husband was not one of those men who hang upon the utterances or watch the looks of their wives. He allowed the woman he had chosen ample liberty, only requiring that her toilette should be perfect, her voice harmonious, her movements graceful, and her reputation spotless. For it is an understood thing, that whatever character Cæsar himself may bear, there must be no possibility of suspicion with regard to Cæsar's wife.

Harold Jerningham and Laurence Desmond had met very often before to-day. It happened that the Jerninghams were also on their way to Vienna, and had made their arrangements for travelling by the same train as that chosen by Laurence. They met at the station, and travelled together, Mr. Jerningham being very well pleased to find the tedium of the journey beguiled by masculine companionship. Mrs. Jerningham sat in a corner of the carriage, very silent and impenetrable, but beautiful to look

upon in the fitful glare of the railway lamp, or in occasional glimpses of moonlight.

That night-journey was the beginning of a closer acquaintanceship between Harold Jerningham and Laurence Desmond. During the ensuing London season the younger man was a frequent visitor at the house of the elder. The Jerninghams met Mr. Desmond at parties. They met him in the following winter at a country house; sat round the same fire at Christmas time, and shuddered at the same ghost-stories; danced in the same condescending quadrille at a ball of servants and tenantry, and plucked costly trinkets from the same Christmas-tree—Harold always more or less distinguished by the tone of a being who had endured a previous existence in every star in the planetary system, and was wearily "doing" his last world before final extinction.

Mrs. Jerningham had learned by this time to meet her old friend without sudden pallor or sudden blushes. If she met him very often, she met him by favour of that chain of accidents which links together the lives of some men and women. She happened to be buying hyacinths in the Pantheon during the hour which the hard-working editor snatched from the cares of journalism in the sweet cause of friendship, bringing to bear all the forces of his mighty intellect on the selection of a squirrel, intended for a birthday-gift to a fellow-worker's little girl. If the purchase of the hyacinths and the squirrel occupied a longer time than is usually devoted to such small transactions, it must be remembered that there is great room for the exercise of taste and discretion in the choice of flowers which are to fill a jardinière of the real old *bleu de roi* Sèvres, and an animal which is to twirl perpetually for the delight of one's friend. Nor was there anything extraordinary in the fact that Mr. Jerningham and his wife encountered Laurence Desmond ever and anon at the Opera, at the Botanical and Zoological Gardens, and at other places of public resort. The circle in which decent people revolve is such a narrow one that there must needs be these accidental encounters at every turn in the crowded ring.

"I fancy we meet Mr. Desmond a little more frequently than other people," Harold Jerningham said one day to his wife; and this was the only occasion on which he made any special mention of the editor's name.

It was about a week after Mr. Jerningham made this remark, that Emily found a letter awaiting her on the table of her morning-room. The letter was addressed in her husband's hand, sealed with her husband's arms and cipher. It was his habit to write her little notes informing her of his movements when the pressing business of their useless existence separated them for a day or so; but he did not usually seal his letters. This letter

was sealed; and there must have been something in the appearance of the document which startled Mrs. Jerningham, for she grew very pale, and her hand trembled as it tore open the envelope.

The length of the letter was not calculated to alarm a woman who expected a marital lecture.

"My dear Emily,—The tulip-wood cabinet in which I keep coins is exactly the same as that which you use for your letters. The keys are duplicates. I opened yours instead of my own this morning, in a fit of absence of mind, and saw some letters. I did not read them. The fact of their existence, their number, and the address they bear—which is not to any house of mine, is sufficiently suggestive. Be good enough to remain at home to-morrow. Mr. Halfont will call upon you in the course of the morning.—Truly yours,

"H. J."

This was all. Mr. Halfont was the family lawyer, a person whose name was generally heard in connection with leases. Mrs. Jerningham looked at the two cabinets, one on each side of the fireplace. Yes, they were exactly alike. She had known that always, and might have guessed that the locks and keys were the same. But she had never thought on the subject; the apartment was so entirely her own sanctum; and Harold Jerningham possessed so many cabinets filled with coins and medallions, cameos and intaglios, which he never looked at, and which, after the feverish delight of bidding for them at Christie's, were supremely indifferent to him. How, then, should she have foreseen the possibility of the accident that had happened?

Was it altogether an accident?

Emily took a key from a little casket on the table, and went to one of the cabinets—her own. She opened it, and seated herself in the chair before it—the chair in which Harold Jerningham had sat an hour ago, no doubt. The piece of furniture was half-cabinet, half-secrétaire; and it was here that Mrs. Jerningham was wont to fill in the blanks in those lithographed protestations of rapture or expressions of regret wherewith she accepted or declined the invitations of her acquaintance. It was here she wrote her letters, and it was here she kept the MSS. of those correspondents whose letters were worthy of preservation. They were in a row of pigeon-holes; and amongst those in the pigeon-hole marked D there was a packet tied with ribbon. That tendency to render a bundle of dangerous letters conspicuous by a circle of bright-hued ribbon is one of womanhood's fatal weaknesses.

Mrs. Jerningham took out the packet and contemplated it thoughtfully.

"I wish he had read the letters," she said to herself; "it would have been much better for both of us if he had read them."

She looked at the address upon the topmost envelope:

"E. J.,
"*Post Office,*
"*Vigo Street.*"

"It was very wrong to have them directed to a post-office," she thought to herself.

She packed the letters in a sheet of paper, and directed the packet to her husband, with a brief note, the composition of which cost her much trouble. She shed some few tears while she was writing this note; but she took care that they should not fall on the paper. There was a certain firmness and decision in her manner which was scarcely compatible with the feelings of an utterly guilty woman.

Mrs. Jerningham had a long interview with her husband's lawyer on the following day, an interview which had in it none of the unpleasant elements of a "scene." After this the house in Park Lane was abandoned by both master and mistress. Mr. Jerningham was abroad; Mrs. Jerningham at one of the country houses. It was not till the following season that the world in which the Jerninghams lived became aware that the Jerninghams had parted. So small an amount of union is necessary to constitute marriage in this upper world that the fact of the separation only became patent on the establishment of the toy-villa at Hampton.

CHAPTER X.

THERE IS ALWAYS THE SKELETON.

In this bright summer-time the gardens of the toy-villa were a paradise of roses. The lawns were dotted by great clumps and mounds of blossom; red and white damask and maiden's-blush jostling one another in rich profusion. Tall standard-roses climbed skyward on iron rods, rustic baskets brimmed over with the precious flowers; and there were so many creeping tendrils entwining thin iron-work arches and airy colonnades, that the visitor who approached Mrs. Jerningham made his way to her presence beneath a gentle shower of perfumed petals.

Under the falling rose-petals went the editor of the *Areopagus* one sultry morning. He had come from London by rail, and the dust of the journey was white upon his dark blue coat. He looked a little wan and jaded in the searching July sunshine, a little the worse for late hours and perennial anxieties; and he

sighed ever so faintly as a warm gust of summer wind flung a spray of blossom against his face.

The river lay before him, deeply blue under the cloudless sky; and on his left, half hidden amongst guelder-roses and the dark foliage of myrtle and magnolia, there was the villa, a fantastical edifice, in which the Tudor, the Moorish, the Italian, and the mediæval Norman forms of architecture had struggled for pre-eminence; a house which seemed all windows, and in which every window was of a different type—the house of all others to be dear to the heart of a woman.

The garden of roses, the river, and the fantastical villa made altogether a very charming picture—a picture which Mr. Desmond contemplated with a half-regretful sigh.

"Surely one ought to find happiness in such a place!" he said to himself.

He had entered by a little gate that was rarely locked; and he went across the lawn towards an open drawing-room window, with the air of a man who has no need of ceremonial announcement. Mrs. Jerningham came out of the window as he approached.

"Good morning, Mr. Desmond," she said, as they shook hands. "Have you come by rail—on such a warm day too? That is very good of you. I think a noonday ride in a railway carriage at this time of year is a species of martyrdom. One thinks of the iron coffin and the Piombi at Venice, and that kind of thing."

Mr. Desmond looked at the speaker, doubtfully. This was evidently not exactly the reception he was accustomed to receive from Mrs. Jerningham.

"If you are going to talk to me like a stage-widow, Emily, I had better go back to town," said he, gravely.

"How should I talk to you? I see you so seldom now, that I lose the habit of adapting my conversation to your taste. I think stage-widows are very charming people. At any rate, they always find *something* to say, and that is an important consideration."

"I have been very much occupied lately."

"It seems to me that you are always very much occupied. I saw your name, by the bye, amongst the names of the people at the breakfast at Pembury."

"I was obliged to go to Pembury."

"And you were at Marble Hill on Tuesday."

"I had particular business with Lord Chorlton."

"And you chose the occasion of an archery fête for your business."

"I was glad to seize any opportunity. Chorlton is not easily to be got at."

"Oh, please don't speak of him as if he were a jockey," exclaimed the lady, with an air of irrepressible irritation.

"What has happened to annoy you this morning, Mrs. Jerningham?"

"Nothing—this morning."

"But something *has* annoyed you."

"Yes, I am tired of my life; that is all that ails me, Mr. Desmond. I am tired of my life. Of course you will tell me that it is very wicked to be tired of one's life, and that there are people starving in those dreadful London alleys who would be very glad to come and live here, and stare at the river, and wonder whether the swans are tired of *their* lives, as I do hour after hour in all the long, long days of the long, long summer But, you see, that doesn't make my case any better. I am very sorry for the poor people; and if it were not so impossible to imagine them in conjunction with amber-silk furniture, I am sure they would be very welcome to come here. I have made a feeble attempt to do some good in my neighbourhood; but I find that other people can do that kind of thing much better than I, and that my money is all that is really necessary. My life passes, and the time, which is so long as it crawls by, leaves no mark behind it. And then, when I look forward to the future, I see—a blank."

Her tone and manner had become more serious as she went on. They had walked away from the house, and by this time were in a sheltered pathway that bordered the river.

"Yet the future may not be altogether blank, Emily," answered Laurence. "There may come a time when——"

"Yes; I know what you mean. There may come a time when I shall be as free as you were before you met me in the hospital at Bundersbad. I sometimes fancy that, if you or I ever see that day, it will come too late. There are sacrifices which cost too much, and the sacrifice which you have made for me is one of them."

"The greater sacrifice has been on your side," said the editor, very gravely.

"I do not know that, Laurence. I sometimes think that your bondage must be harder to bear than mine. For nine years you have patiently endured all the complaints and caprices of a discontented woman, when you might have had a bright home, and a happy wife to bid you welcome in it, but for me."

"The bright home and the happy wife may be mine yet, Emily."

"If they ever are yours, they will come to you too late. A home is one of the blessings which must not be waited for. A man loses the habit of home-life. I have seen something of this, you know, in my father's life. He did not marry till he was between forty and fifty; and when he married, he had lost the capability of being happy at home. It will be the same

with you, Laurence, if you do not marry soon. The hard, worldly way of thinking, and the self-contained feelings of a bachelor, are growing stronger with you day by day, and even a wife whom you loved would hardly be able to make home agreeable to you. And this is all my fault, Laurence—my fault!"

"This is not fair, Emily," said Mr. Desmond, almost sternly. "When I lament the restraints of my position, it will be time for you to reproach yourself on my account, and not till then. Pray let us be reasonable. When you and Harold Jerningham parted for ever, it was agreed between us that we should be friends, and friends only, so long as your husband's life should last. He is so many years our senior, that it is not possible for us to ignore the fact that in all likelihood the day will come when you and I can be united by a sweeter tie than that of friendship. If there be a sin involved in looking forward to that day hopefully, but not impatiently—I have been guilty of that sin; but I have been guilty of no other wrong against the man who bears your name. God knows, and you know, that I have been true to our compact. I have been your friend, and nothing but your friend. No shadow of a lover's caprice, no touch of a lover's jealousy, has ever clouded our friendship. It has been the one bright oasis in the desert of an anxious and laborious life. And if you think that the treasure is unvalued by me because I do not spend three days a week in the delicious idleness of this garden, or because I do not waste all my evenings in your drawing-room, you are only a new example of the ignorance which obtains among your class with regard to the necessities of a working life."

Mrs. Jerningham's face brightened considerably while Mr. Desmond was speaking. It was a fine patrician face, with the bloom of youth still upon it, in spite of the lady's nine-and-twenty years' residence in this planet. She turned to Mr. Desmond with a smile, and held out her hand.

"Shake hands, Laurence, and forgive me," she said, gently. It was part of their covenant that they should be at liberty to address each other by their Christian names, but that none of the epithets sacred to the use of lovers should ever obtain currency between them.

"And you are really not tired of your position?" said Mrs. Jerningham, with a pleading smile.

"Have I ever hinted a complaint?"

"No, Laurence. But then you are not the kind of person to complain. You would be like that dreadful Spartan boy one never hears the last of: you would hide the animal—why do some people call it a wolf, and others a fox, by-the-bye?—under your waistcoat, and go about the world smiling the smile of

martyrdom. I am so afraid of doing you a great wrong. Poets and novelists are always preaching about a woman's unselfishness; but I really think that is one of the formulas of their art. Have I not shown myself very selfish, Laurence? I allowed my foolish eyes to be dazzled by that Dead-Sea fruit which the world calls a splendid marriage; and having bitten the apple and found the bitterness of its core, I share the ashes with you."

"I am very well content with the ashes."

"Some day you will be tired of your bondage."

"When that day comes I will ask you for my freedom."

"Will you promise me that, Laurence?"

"With all my heart."

"In that case I am quite happy," answered the lady eagerly. "And you really do not wish to claim your freedom, immediately, Laurence?"

"Neither immediately nor in the remote future. If Mr. Jerningham should live to be a hundred years of age, at which period I should be eighty, the bachelor habits which you reprobate may, perhaps, have taken complete possession of me; but as Mr. Jerningham is not the kind of man whose life would be taken on the most reasonable terms by the Norwich Union or the European, I can afford to place my faith in time."

"Laurence, there is something so horrible in this calculation."

"I do not calculate; I wait. And now let us talk of something else. You have not asked me any of your usual questions about the toilettes at Marble Hill."

"I don't want to know anything about them," replied Mrs. Jerningham, frigidly.

Mr. Desmond winced. A man's intellect, however acute, is rarely equal to the exigences of feminine society. The châtelaine of Marble Hill happened to be one of those matrons who cannot bring themselves to think well of any woman living apart from her husband. Emily Jerningham's name had been wont to figure in the lady's visiting-list, and had vanished therefrom immediately after the establishment of the villa at Hampton.

"The fête was rather a dull affair," said Mr. Desmond, presently, with that clumsy hypocrisy which is the male creature's best substitute for tact.

"What did Lady Laura Paunceford wear?" asked Mrs. Jerningham, with feminine inconsistency.

"Oh, some wonderful costume of blue, very cloudy and voluminous, like the dress of a goddess in one of Sir Godfrey Kneller's ceilings. I believe she wore something that was intended for a bonnet—a blue gauze butterfly, skewered to her head by silver arrows."

"Did she look well?"

"By no means; she is not a daylight beauty."

"And Miss Fitzormond?"

"Miss Fitzormond's dress was absolutely dowdy. A new style, Mrs. Castlemaine told me; the last rage in Paris; and supposed to have been developed from the fair Eugénie's inner consciousness. It is rather hard upon the Empress that she should be accredited with every atrocity invented by the enterprising milliners of the Fauburg St. Honoré."

"What was the dress?" Mrs. Jerningham demanded languidly.

"Something mauve, festooned with steel chains and spikes; Miss Fitzormond looked like a mauve prisoner escaped from Newgate."

"Were there many pretty women at the fête? No; you needn't answer me. Of course you will declare that you found yourself amidst an assemblage of Gorgons. Men are so fearful of wounding a woman's vanity, that they rarely remember she may by some possibility possess a grain or two of common-sense. Let us go to the dining-room. It is time for luncheon, and I dare say my aunt has been sending skirmishers out to look for me."

"There is a parcel of books and music at the station. Will you send for it?"

"With delight. How good of you to bring me more new books!"

"Are you prepared to stand a competitive examination in the last I brought you?"

"Better than you in the works of the authors you have lately annihilated, Mr. Editor and Reviewer."

On this they went back to the house, where they were received by the most amiable of dragons, dressed in dove-coloured silk, and a pale-blue morning-cap, which made middle age a state for youth to envy. The luncheon, in common with all the surroundings of Harold Jerningham's wife, was perfection. The spirit of the elegant Harold himself pervaded this house, across the threshold whereof his foot had never passed. It was Mr. Jerningham's pet architect who had restored the miniature mansion, and Mr. Jerningham's favourite upholsterer who had decorated and furnished the interior. When Mrs. Jerningham wanted a new servant, it was Mr. Jerningham's steward who supplied the vacancy in her well-organized establishment. Life had been made very easy for her since her separation from her husband—a little too easy, perhaps; for a woman who has none of the ordinary cares of her sex is apt to create troubles of her own.

People who wondered and speculated about the separation were often surprised to hear Mr. Jerningham say: "I have bought that picture for my wife;" or, "I am looking for a safe pony-phaeton for my wife;" or, "I want to find a good binder

for some books of my wife's." He took pains to let the world know that he was on excellent terms with the lady in the toy-villa; and this certificate of character had served Emily Jerningham in good stead. Her husband's diplomacy might have kept even the sacred portals of such houses as Marble Hill open to her, if Mr. Desmond had not been quite so frequent a visitor at her house. But the world is slow to believe in a Platonic attachment, and it is not to be denied that the friendship of Laurence Desmond had cost Mrs. Jerningham a certain price.

Nor was that friendship altogether pleasant to her. The conversation of this morning was only a variation upon a very familiar theme. Again and again Mr. Desmond had been called upon to listen to the same complaints, and to dispel the same doubts. There were times when he was very conscious of the pain and weariness involved in this state of things. There were times when a still, small voice within him echoed Emily Jerningham's wish that they had never met in the hospital at Bundersbad, never renewed the friendship so near akin to love, never interchanged those foolish sentimental letters which had caused the separation of Harold and his wife. It seemed such a weak, frivolous, despicable piece of wrong-doing, now that it was done, and had exercised a lifelong influence upon the destinies of three people.

If Mrs. Jerningham was doubtful and suspicious of Mr. Desmond, he on his part was not entirely at his ease about her. Was she happy? He asked himself that question very often, and the answer was not always pleasant to him.

"No real happiness ever came of wrong-doing," he said to himself; "we did wrong, and we are paying the price of our folly."

It was only to himself that Mr. Desmond ever said so much as this. To Emily Jerningham he was always the same—an attentive and respectful friend—patient, chivalrous, and self-sacrificing as a social Bayard; but not to be beguiled from the duties of his professional position, even by the claims of friendship.

CHAPTER XI.

"J'AIME: IL FAUT QUE J'ESPÈRE."

EUSTACE THORBURN found existence altogether a new kind of thing at the old house amongst the Berkshire woods. His sorrow for the death of his mother was no transient shadow, to be dispelled by the first bright glimpse of sunlight that fell across his pathway. It was a deep and enduring sorrow; but it was a grief which held a fixed place in his mind, apart from the common joys and vexations of life. All through those bright

summer days the young man showed himself a cheerful companion, an enthusiastic student, a willing and devoted worker; and it was only by his mourning dress that those amongst whom he lived were reminded of his recent loss. But every night, in the stillness of his own room, the familiar agony came back to his breast; memory and imagination travelled again upon the beaten track; and he thought of his mother's joyless womanhood and lonely death with a pain as bitter as that which he had felt when he stood beside her newly-made grave.

Such things as these are not to be forgotten. Are they not the "pathetic minor" which underlies all the harmonies of earth, heard more or less distinctly, but silent never?

The one clue which his mother's letter afforded had been sedulously followed up by Eustace. The stranger calling himself Hardwick was the writer of a book first published in the year '43; and a book of some repute, as the young man gathered from the letters of his unknown father. Eustace had Mrs. Willows' authority for the fact that the book was some kind of novel or romance; and, acting upon this information, he devoted himself for three consecutive days to an examination of the critical magazines and periodicals of that year in the reading-room of the British Museum.

The result of his labours was not particularly satisfactory. So many romances published within the year were spoken of as the best novels of the season, or as works bearing the seal of genius, or as the promise of greater things from the matured mind of the writer, that it needed much sifting of all this chaff before the amount of genuine wheat contained therein could be fairly estimated. But at last, after a careful study of the *Literary Gazette* and *Athenæum*, the quarterlies and monthlies, Eustace Thorburn selected, from a long list of brilliant successes and best novels of the season, three books, each of which seemed to bear upon it the stamp of something greater than amiable mediocrity.

These are the titles of the three books which Eustace Thorburn selected, after having read them carefully and thoughtfully:

1. *Dion:* a Confession.
2. *Latimer's Sister:* a Story. By Marcus Anderton.
3. *The Spectre of Walden:* a Romance. By G. G. G.

Of these three, *Dion* was the most singular; *Latimer's Sister* the most tender; *The Spectre* the most poetical. Any one of these books might have exercised a powerful effect upon the mind of a sentimental woman. That they were all three written by men, and by young men, Eustace entertained no doubt. He did not, indeed, trust entirely to his own judgment; for he enlisted the services of his Uncle Dan, and induced that practised reviewer to read the three books.

"An masculine work!" cried Mr. Mayfield. "No woman could have written *Latimer's Sister* without telling us when the young lady who figures as the heroine wore blue silk, or how lovely she looked in pink tarlatane. *The Spectre* is a translation from the German. No Englishman would have been as simple and true to nature in his peasant-life; and I recognize untranslatable German compounds in my friend's phraseology. The book which indicates power, and even genius, is *Dion*. I have a sort of hazy recollection of hearing that book talked about when I was a young man, and of hearing that it was written by some sprig of quality. In my opinion, Eustace, that story of *Dion* is the kind of book to fascinate a girl."

"It is so morbid, so gloomy."

"Gloom is the very thing a girl loves, especially when it is the gloom of the storm-cloud—passion, and anguish, and so on. Depend upon it, my dear lad, *Dion* is the book that man wrote—the book your mother was reading in the unlucky hour in which he first saw her face."

"I am inclined to believe that you are right, Uncle Dan," Eustace answered thoughtfully. "It is evidently the work of a scholar."

"Yes, but of a very young scholar. The learning is there, but in a crude, half-digested state. The pages bristle with fragments of old-world wisdom. The wisdom does not underlie the whole, it is not interwoven with the very fabric of the book, as in the work of a mature mind. There is passion and poetry,—a hazy kind of poetry, but with a certain fascination and grace of its own,—the poetry of a man who has never written for bread, or been troubled by uncertainties about his dinner. That parting with the girl Una is very pretty; and the dream in the ruined manor-house has a weird power. One almost feels the cold winds blowing through the windows that will not shut; one almost sees the midnight shadows of ash and poplar lying black on the moss-grown flags of the quadrangle, and all the nakedness and desolation of the place. Yes, Eustace, there is the glamour of youth and poetry upon *Dion;* I should not wonder if the man who wrote that book were the man who won your mother's heart."

Daniel Mayfield spoke with an air of conviction that had considerable influence upon his nephew. He went back to the reviews of *Dion*, in the hope of finding some clue to the writer in the opinions and speculations of the reviewers.

In this he was disappointed. The reviewers told him no more than his Uncle Dan had told him. They judged the writer as Mr. Mayfield had judged him, from the evidence of the book; they had evidently no knowledge outside the book. The mystery of anonymous publication had been religiously preserved, and as

the book had created some sensation at the time of its appearance, there had been considerable speculation as to the individuality of the writer.

The result of all this speculation was limited to the following deductions:

1st. The writer of the book was a young man who had gone through the usual curriculum of a university education.

2nd. The style and manner of thinking were eminently Oxonian.

3rd. The writer was well acquainted with Continental life.

4th. He was as familiar with German literature as with the classics.

5th. His proclivities were aristocratic; his contempt for the masses supreme and undisguised.

6th. His philosophy was epicurean; his gods the graceful divinities of Greece; his nature sensuous, selfish, but not altogether base. He was an ardent worshipper of the beautiful. He thirsted for woman's love,—the pure, the true; but it was the purity and truth of earth's primæval freedom for which he languished, rather than the divine sentiment allowed by Christian rule.

Upon these points the reviewers were strong, and they had sufficient justification for their opinion. The book was pervaded by the personality of the writer. It was indeed a confession, an autobiographical record, in which the events and circumstances of actual life were doubtless altered and disguised, but a record which laid bare the heart and mind of the man.

Eustace read the book at the British Museum, and persuaded his uncle to read it at the same place. He tried to obtain a copy of the story; but *Dion* had long been out of print. The booksellers had only the faintest recollection of a book of that name, and of the fact that it had created some slight stir during the brief season of its popularity.

"I'll get you a copy of the book, sooner or later, if your heart is set upon it, lad," said Daniel Mayfield. "You know what a habitual book-stall lounger I am, and how many times I have had my pocket picked while I have been dipping into one of the Neo-Platonists, or an Amsterdam edition of Hysminias and Hysmine, before a second-hand bookseller's emporium. *Dion* is just the sort of book to figure in a bookseller's box of odd volumes—'All these at twopence,'—and, depend upon it, I shall meet with the gentleman some day. I know a man who is very clever at picking up any out-of-the-way book I happen to want; and if you wish it, I'll set him to work."

"I shall be very glad if you do; I would willingly give a guinea for that book."

"I'll get it you for half the money; but I wish to heaven you

would abandon all speculations about this man, who, after all, may not be the author of *Dion*."

"That I shall never do while my brain has power to speculate; so let us say no more about that, Uncle Dan."

It was rather late in the autumn when Eustace Thorburn made his researches at the British Museum. He obtained a few days' holiday from his employer, and shared his Uncle Daniel's lodgings in Great Ormond Street,—big rooms that had once been very grand and noble, and which, even now, had a pleasant airy aspect, and some remains of old-world splendour.

The "few days" stretched themselves into a week before the young man had completed his studies, but at the end of the week he bade his kinsman good-bye, and went back to Berkshire, in no wise sorry to return to the park and forest, the winding river and odorous flower-garden of his new home.

In no wise sorry? Could there be gladness more complete than that which filled his breast as he returned to the house he had learned to think of as a home?

"M. de Bergerac's book will be finished by and by, and he will have no further need of my services," thought the returning traveller, as the sober goddess of common-sense projected her dark shadow athwart the sunlit realms of fancy. "I shall have to bid farewell to these new friends, and begin the world once more among strangers. I suppose that will be the story of my life. I may find friends; I may attach myself to a stranger's house, until I almost fancy I have kindred and a home, like the rest of mankind; and then, just when I am happiest, my foolish dream will end all at once, and I shall have to begin life again. Oh, let me be patient when the trial comes! My life can never be so sad and dreary as *her's* was."

Further reflection developed consoling ideas that brought back a happy smile to the traveller's lips.

"The *History of Superstition* will not be finished for many a long year at its present rate of progress," he said to himself. "I could wish for nothing better than to live for ever at the bailiff's cottage, working for the kindest of employers."

He could not, indeed, imagine any state of happiness more perfect than that which he enjoyed in Theodore de Bergerac's quiet home, after all due reservation had been made for that secret sorrow which was not altogether to be put away from his mind, even when his surroundings were brightest.

Life at Greenlands was very quiet. The scholar and his daughter were a modern Prospero and Miranda, with trim maid-servants to wait upon them instead of Caliban; and the new Miranda's life was not much less lonely than that of her prototype on the enchanted isle. Mademoiselle de Bergerac had very few friends and no acquaintance. She had never been to school,

and she had scarcely heard the names of those pleasures and excitements which are the necessities of fashionable damsels. To take tea with the curate's daughters, under the walnut-trees in the prettiest corner of the lawn, was a delightful festivity; to picnic at Burnham Beeches with her father and two or three chosen friends was a matter of almost bewildering excitement; to creep along by the willowy margin of the river in her own light skiff, while her father sat in the stern reciting some of Victor Hugo's noblest verses for her edification, was a quiet rapture above and beyond all those unknown pleasures of whose existence she was vaguely conscious.

Never was maiden better pleased with her own life and her own surroundings than Helen de Bergerac. She had the Gallic vivacity of disposition, the sanguine, romantic temperament of the Celt. She adored her father, and adored the fair English country, and the river, and her dog, and Greenlands; and it was only sometimes, in a tender reverie, that she pictured to herself sunnier lands,—the vineyards of Provence, the towers and steeples of Norman cities, the broad blue waters of the Seine, broken by islets of tender green, and curving like a silver bow, by valley and woodland, chalky cliff and quaint nestling town, gray rock and mediæval castle, half-fortress, half-château.

Mademoiselle de Bergerac thought of this romantic land sometimes, and sighed for a state of things that might bring about her father's return to his native country. For the exiled family she entertained a sentiment that was akin to adoration, confounding all distinction between *famille aînée* and *famille cadette;* and beholding in the quiet country gentlemen of Twickenham and Bushey the direct descendants of that bold warrior whose white plume flashed like a star athwart the serried ranks at Fontenoy.

But second only to her affection for that country whereof she knew so little, and which must always be more or less a dream-land for her, was Mademoiselle de Bergerac's affection for Berkshire, the land of her birth, the pastoral scene amidst which there was one corner, one quiet grave in a village churchyard—a grave above which there bloomed roses more beautiful than common flowers growing in common gardens—that must for ever make this one spot holier in her eyes than all other regions of this lower world. To keep her father's house, to supply in some measure the place of that dear companion who was lost to him, to sustain the student's ambition, and to watch the scholar's health, meting out the midnight oil, and restraining the too eager spirit in the interests of the ill-used flesh,—in these things was comprised the desire of Helen de Bergerac's heart and mind.

She received her father's secretary with a most delightful cordiality, accepting this new member of the family with a grace

as easy as if he had been some long-absent brother or cousin come from beyond seas to take his place in the household. Prudery and affectation were unknown to this sylvan damsel. She found it rather agreeable than otherwise to have a well-bred, well-informed young man in attendance upon her when she inspected her garden, or supervised the arrangement of a rustic banquet under the chestnuts on the lawn. She found it agreeable to be assisted in her reading by some one whose time was less occupied, and whose erudition was less alarming than her father's. She found it pleasant to have a friend who went to the extremest lengths in the worship of Beethoven and Weber,—a friend who could discourse most eloquently of Hugo and Shakespeare, Bulwer and Göthe, Balzac and Thackeray, while her father dozed in the quiet summer twilights, wearied out by his long day's labour,—a friend who seemed, strange to say, always intensely interested in every subject that happened to interest her,—a knight-errant who, living perchance in a prosaic century, was fain to demonstrate his devotion by the clipping of faded rose-leaves, and the hunting out of recondite islands and promontories in the classic atlas,—a friend who, by some unerring instinct, contrived always to do and say precisely what she wished,—a friend who was always the right man in the right place.

"I don't know how it is, but it seems to me that I am always right," remarked the young Duchess of Burgundy with charming *naïveté;* and Mademoiselle de Bergerac on more than one occasion gave utterance to observations quite as *naïf* on the subject of her new acquaintance.

"I really cannot tell how it is Mr. Thorburn always contrives to make himself so agreeable, papa," she said.

The simple-hearted book-worm was no less blind than his daughter.

"I am glad you like him, my love," he replied, carelessly. "I was rather afraid you might object to a third person in the house. He is a most admirable young man. For hunting out a reference or a quotation, he is, I think, unrivalled. I only hope I shall be able to keep him till my book is finished; but that will be a long time, Helen, a very long time—if I live to finish it at all."

"Dear, dear father," murmured the girl, tenderly; and then she continued, with some appearance of alarm, "Do you think Mr. Thorburn wishes to leave us?"

"No, my dear, I have no reason to think that. But he is very young, you know; and this must be a dull kind of life for a young man."

"And yet I am sure Mr. Thorburn is not unhappy. He had only just lost his mother, you know, when he came to us; and

of course the memory of that loss makes him thoughtful and melancholy sometimes. But I am sure he is quite content to lead our quiet life, papa, and that he takes a very deep interest in your book. He told me the other day that he cannot venture to look forward to the end of that book; it seems to him like looking forward to the end of his life."

"It is, indeed, an interesting subject, my love," replied M. de Bergerac, with complacency, "and an almost inexhaustible one—the history of superstition: a mighty record, a vast survey, embracing the length and breadth of this earth, from the monstrous temples of the East to the classic shrines of the West—from the altar of the Carthaginian Æsculapius to the funeral pyre of the Scandinavian Balder. I am much pleased to think the young man likes his work. He is very clever."

"Is he not clever, papa? He wrote a little poem the other day, and he asked my opinion of it. As if *my* opinion could be worth having! It was charming. I do not think your favourite Catullus, whom you praise so much, and yet will not allow me to read, could have written anything more graceful. It is full of that mournful languor that there is in some of Victor Hugo's minor poems, and in Longfellow's—a sweet, calm sadness that pierces one's heart."

"I am glad he distracts himself by the composition of verses," said the scholar. "There are some who consider such a course of reading as he is now engaged in dry and laborious; but to my mind there can be no better nurture for a poet. I trust Mr. Thorburn may achieve some kind of success in the future."

"I think he writes or studies a good deal at night, after you have done with him."

"How do you know that, my dear?"

"Through Susan, papa. She is always complaining about the candles. You know how economical she is; and I assure you Mr. Thorburn's consumption of candles is quite an affliction to her. I wonder whether the Grecian *ménagères* were angry when their lords consumed the midnight oil. Perhaps that was one of Xantippe's grievances. I don't think Socrates could have been a *very* agreeable husband."

"That point is open to discussion," said the scholar, slyly. "We possess the sage's opinion of Xantippe, but we do not possess Xantippe's opinion of the sage."

The weeks and months slipped by, and the fern was sear and brown in Windsor Great Park and Forest, and all the woodlands of Berkshire were leafless; but Eustace Thorburn showed no signs of distaste for his labours as secretary and amanuensis, collator and collaborateur. He languished for no change, he pined for no pleasure. His considerate employer had borrowed

an extra horse from the stables of the great house, where there was still the remnant of a noble stud; and at his suggestion the young man took long rides in the early morning, before the day's studious drudgery began. It was very pleasant to come home to breakfast in the snug old-fashioned parlour, and to be welcomed by Mademoiselle de Bergerac, whose bright eyes grew brighter at sight of some sprig of rare comb-bearing fern. Life at Greenlands seemed, indeed, to be altogether an existence of perfect and serene delight, only overshadowed now and then by the vague consciousness that it was too sweet to last.

"The time will come when I shall have to pack my portmanteau and bid her good-bye," the young man said to himself, in moments of sober meditation at night, when he sat alone in his pleasant room, and some break, some stagnation in the course of his composition brought him to a standstill; "or some one will come and see her, and learn to love her as dearly as I love her even; and he will be in a position to say the sweet words I dare not say to her; and I shall hear the jangling village-bells some misty summer morning, and she will come in her white bridal dress to bid me farewell. Men have to bear such pain as that, and to bear it quietly."

By these reflections it will be seen that Eustace Thorburn, without fortune, friends, or name, and with the ever-present consciousness of the bar-sinister on his escutcheon, had presumed to fall in love with the only child of his employer. Could he have done otherwise? "Lives there a wretch with soul so dead" as to be able to inhabit the same dwelling with a Helen de Bergerac for six months and not own himself her worshipper and slave ere the sixth month is ended? Eustace Thorburn had surrendered himself an unresisting victim to the pitiless goddess who sways the weak souls of men, as her kinswoman Artemis rules the tides of ocean. He had allowed himself to be cradled in the shadowy arms of Fancy, rocked to the sweetest sleep that was ever broken by bitter waking.

"I know that it must end in misery," he said to himself; "but it is so sweet—while it lasts."

He loved her, and he feared that his love was hopeless. Simple as M. de Bergerac's life might be, he bore upon him the stamp of the old *noblesse*. He was of that nation whose *dernière grand dame* died with Queen Marie-Amélie; and it was not to be supposed there was no latent pride of birth beneath that graceful humility of manner which rendered the exile so dear to the cottagers and peasant children about Greenlands.

"I think he would give his daughter to a poor man," thought Eustace, when he meditated this vital question; "for his soul seems to me so pure and noble as to be above all consideration of worldly wealth; and then Helen's simple habits fit her for a poor

man's wife. But I cannot think that he would consent to an alliance with a man of low origin, or of unknown origin, which to that proud and pure mind would seem worse than the lowest, since it must bear the stigma of shame."

There were times when a hope—vague but exquisite—awoke in the young man's breast as he pondered on the future. If he was nameless to-day, must he needs go nameless to the grave? Might he not win for himself a renown that would give grace and lustre to that simple family name of Thorburn, which he had seen on his grandfather's tombstone? Was it only a foolish presumption, the besotted vanity of a young pedant, which buoyed him up and supported him in his hours of depression? Was that word *Parvenir*, which he had taken for himself as his motto, and cherished in secret as the watchword of his life, only the formula of a braggart? Was that pleasant land of dreams, in which he was wont to take refuge when the world of realities seemed dark and dreary, only a fool's paradise?

Insomuch as poetic dreams and aspirations can make a man a poet, Eustace Thorburn was a member of that glorious brotherhood which began with Homer; but it yet remained to be shown whether he were gifted with something more than the vague yearnings and lofty imaginings of the dreamer who would fain admit the world within the mystic portals of his fair shadowland. To think high thoughts, to dream delicious dreams, is one thing; but to be able to translate thought and dream into the eloquent verse of a Byron, or the polished syllables of a Tennyson, is another thing. To how many eyes the Coliseum and the Adriatic, the Drachenfels and the quiet field that lies beyond Ardennes, may have seemed as fair as they appeared to the eyes of that one lonely traveller who has recorded his wanderings in words that can never die! How many brains must have been crowded by grand imaginings, how many hearts must have beat high with the dreamer's enthusiasm, as the youth of England have trodden the ground that is hallowed by the footsteps of heroes and demigods! and yet, of all the youth of England, there has been but one whose poetic record of his emotions has reached a second edition, and held a place in the memory of mankind. Of all the men who read the rugged legends of Macbeth and Lear, the Italian story of Othello's passion and Iago's cunning, there was only one man who could give to the crude unshapely records life and form, immortal as his own genius!

Whether Eustace Thorburn possessed that subtle and wondrous power of expression, that mystic sympathy with the minds of his fellow-men, that marvellous perception which is a kind of clairvoyance, time alone could show. He had his moments of proud hope, his hours of abject depression; but he worked on patiently, steadily, devoting more than one quiet hour of every

night to the composition of a narrative poem—dramatic, philosophical, passionate, and perhaps just a little tainted with the egotism which is so common in the work of youthful genius.

Eustace Thorburn had no suspicion that the hero of his poetic fiction was a shadow of himself, a projection of his own brain; but he knew that the heroine was an airy sister of Helen de Bergerac, and that the love of his Egbert for his Amy was very near a-kin to his own love for Helen.

There was no odour of the midnight oil in the poet's verses. They breathed the freshness of youth, the perfume of woods and groves; the harmonious lines were musical with the ripple of cool waters, the low sound of leafy branches swaying gently in the summer wind. The life which Eustace Thorburn led at Greenlands was the ideal existence for which the poet sighs, for which he yearns with fond imaginings, pent up in the darksome city counting-house, chained to the cruel wheel of distasteful labour. Nor was the young man ungrateful to Providence, or to the kindly kinsman who had procured for him so pleasant a position. He thanked God for his easy existence, his congenial labours; and he wrote sweet, playful letters, full of affection and gratitude, to Uncle Dan, who treasured those effusions, and was pleased to favour his friends and boon-companions with the recital of eloquent little bits in those delightful epistles.

"What would you give to be able to write like that, Tom Granger?" he said to one of his associates. "You write uncommonly well, you know, dear boy, and so does John Harrington, and Ted Rochester, and Frank Dorset; and there's plenty of *chic* in all you do. You all write uncommonly well, Tom; you can all describe the things you see every day, *from the outside*, with a certain amount of smartness; but there is no more evidence of thought in your compositions than if you were so many copying-machines; and you all write so like one another, that if Frank wrote page one, and Ted page two, and John page three, no one but themselves and the compositors who set-up their copy would be any the wiser. You have all got the slang of the day, and you all write for the current market, and you are all wise in your generation. But the day will come when this boy here will show you that a writer may have something more than 'a knack,' and be something more than a publisher's 'clever hand.'"

"I wouldn't mind giving you long odds against that immaculate nephew of yours ever writing a book that will sell," replied the incredulous Tom, in no wise put out of countenance by his friend's exordium. "They all begin in the same style, these young uns. Epic poem about King Arthur, or King Alfred, or King Athelstane, that is to be the Iliad of future generations,—high-falutin sentiment, pure aspirations, and so on. And they

write their epic poems, and pass them on from one publisher's office to another, till the poor valueless manuscripts are limp and dirty; and then they learn to adapt themselves to the requirements of their generation, and turn into 'clever hands' like you and me, Dan. They must all go through the same apprenticeship, and 'learn in suffering what they teach in song,' —that is to say, learn in Whitecross Street what they teach in the monthly magazines, unless they happen to be careful souls, with snug little incomes: in which case they hug their sweet delusions to the last, and publish their epics at their own expense. Epic poems, forsooth! Do you think the Greeks would have read Homer if they had possessed periodical literature?"

"I look upon periodical literature as the sworn foe to learning."

"You are not the first of dirty birds, Daniel Mayfield," cried his friend, sternly; "and now for the divine Louisa."

The "divine Louisa" was Mr. Granger's playful name for unlimited loo, a pastime which cost Daniel Mayfield many a five-pound note in the course of the year, but which he had not the moral courage to forswear. He had his reputation as a Bohemian, and he was too old to hope for a new reputation amongst the ranks of the respectable; so he was fain to be true to the brotherhood in which he had some *status*.

"Better to be a prince among the nomad tribes than a nobody among the Philistines," he said to himself. "One might submit to that, if the Philistines were a perfect race; but when a man sees how much malice and selfishness there may be in the Pharisees and Sadducees, he is apt to prefer the society of publicans and sinners."

These were the arguments with which Daniel Mayfield was wont to stifle the upbraidings of conscience; for the sinner can forgive himself all his other sins more easily than the one sin of a wasted life. Mr. Mayfield had his hours of depression, his moments of savage bitterness; and to escape from these, he fled to the scenes he liked and the friends he loved—the friends who in some sort loved him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

Mrs. Jerningham spent her autumn at Spa, where Mrs. Colton, the amiable dragon, drank the waters with the patient regularity of a valetudinarian, and wondered at the Continental toilettes with the pious wonder of a well-bred provincial Englishwoman, to whom these daring eccentricities of custom—these *bottes à mijambe, en cuir de Russie*, these dainty braided jackets *à la Rigolboche*, these robes *à queue-sans-fin*, and *chapeaux à l'infiniment petit*—were all so much confusion, the climax of

horror and infamy foreshadowed by the Prophet, the abomination of desolation sitting in the high places.

For Emily Jerningham, life at Spa seemed a very dull business. She had no pet ailment to be subjugated by the mineral waters. The pine-woods and stately avenues were very beautiful on fine summer mornings, or beneath the broad glory of the harvest moon; but she had seen them before. It seemed to her as if she knew every pine on the steep hill-side, every branch of the lofty oaks in the valley, every hard, worldly face that was to be seen in the Kursaal. Was there not something wanting in her life, a something for lack of which she must needs be lonely and purposeless wherever she went?

All the pleasures and luxuries that wealth can buy; all the consideration that a good old name can exact; all the respect that a reputation which, despite an occasional shrug from some Rochefoucauld of this generation, may fairly be called stainless, can command—were at the disposal of this fortunate lady, and yet she was not happy. She had too much, and too little. If she had been an utterly selfish and narrow-minded woman, she might have found the perfection of bliss in splendid toilettes and well-appointed equipages, an elegant house and distinguished acquaintance; but something more than these was necessary to complete the sum of Mrs. Jerningham's happiness.

"Of what use am I in the world?" she asked herself, wearily, as she drove her graceful pony-carriage through the crowd which admired and envied her. "I am an expense to my husband; a burden and a restraint for Laurence, who no doubt would have married before this, if it were not for me; and a weariness to myself."

Perhaps this unspoken lament might have been translated thus:

"I have been here a month, and Mr. Desmond has not found time to come to me. He writes me a hurried letter once in ten days, in which, under an unlimited amount of respect, I perceive the lurking poison of indifference; and I am too proud to tell him how intensely I wish to see him, too proud to confess even to myself the pain I suffer because of his absence."

In bidding adieu to Mrs. Jerningham and her companion at the London Bridge station on the morning of their departure, the editor of the *Areopagus* had declared that, if he could give himself a holiday, he would take that holiday at Spa: and the eyes of the younger lady had said "Do!" and the proud line of her lips had softened into a grateful smile.

"We shall expect to see you, Mr. Desmond," she said, at the very last, when he had brought her *Punch* and a damp copy of the newly issued *Areopagus*. Ah, how many a youthful scribbler's ardour has been damped by those cold clammy papers,

deadly chill as the skin of the cobra, and venomous as his sting!

"We shall expect to see you—soon," repeated the lady, with that pretty air of insistence which is so charming in an elegant woman.

"But my dear Mrs. Jerningham, I did not say I would come. I said, I will come if I can get a holiday."

"As if any one could refuse you a holiday! But I will not allow the arrangement to be left in that vague manner. Shall we see you in a week?"

"I fear not."

"In a fortnight?"

"I scarcely like to promise anything till this month is over. There are so many rows on the political *tapis;* and we are bound to go in for an analysis of all the rows. And there is Cumberland's fourteenth volume of 'Catharine II.;' that is a book I am pledged to review myself."

"Pledged to the author?"

"No; to the publisher. Do you think any one on the *Areopagus* ever writes a review to oblige an author? I think, in three weeks, I may be free; and if——"

"Oh, pray do not imperil the fortunes of the *Areopagus* for any caprice of mine! I am sure I should be immensely distressed if my pleasure interfered with the prompt notice of Mr. Cumberland's 'Catharine,'" cried Mrs. Jerningham, with supreme hauteur, and with the injured air of a woman who thinks your regard for her must be very small, if at her behest you refuse to jeopardize a paltry newspaper which cost only twenty thousand pounds or so to establish, or the reputation of a trumpery author, who has only given the labour of a lifetime to his absurd book.

The Dover express moved away before Mr. Desmond could reply to the lady's angry speech, and left him standing on the platform, with a smile, that was half-sad, half-cynical, upon his face.

"They are all alike," he said to himself; "beautiful, delightful, unreasonable, and profoundly selfish. How well that tone of *grande dame* becomes her! How lovely she looked just now, with that crimson flush of wounded pride, and that angry light in her eyes! What a pity it is that a woman cannot believe in the regard of a man who is not ready to behave like an idiot in all the affairs of life for her pleasure! 'You pretend that you love me,' cries offended Beauty, 'and yet you won't forfeit a colonelcy in the Life Guards in order to attend me to a garden-party at Miss Burdett Coutts's! You declare that you adore me, and yet refuse to make a bonfire of your father's family-seat for my amusement.'"

Mr. Desmond's mind was not altogether in his work that day, and more than once the remorseless pen of the editor lay idle in

his hand, while he pondered on a subject which within the last year had become the unanswerable enigma of his existence. It was much easier for him to soothe Emily's doubts with pretty reassuring speeches than to satisfy the perplexities of his own mind.

Was this lukewarm friendship an alliance that good men and pure-minded women could approve—this friendship which must needs be continually measured by the thermometer of the proprieties, lest it should become a degree or so warmer than society could warrant? Was it a fair and honourable thing, this tacit engagement, the fulfilment whereof was contingent on the death of a man whose hand Laurence had taken in friendship many times in the past, whom he might meet with friendly greeting to-morrow? No, a thousand times no! Laurence Desmond was well aware that he occupied one of those false positions into which men sometimes slip unawares, and from which extrication is so difficult.

Could he bring himself to tell Emily Jerningham that this friendship was wrong, and that it lacked even the charm that sweetens some wrong-doing? Could he do this, could he inflict pain upon her, when his own conscience told him that the keen sense of the dishonour involved in his position had only arisen in his mind since the position itself had become wearisome to him?

Yes, this was the *mot de l'énigme*. He had loved her very dearly; but he loved her no longer. He looked backward to the days in which he had walked with her in the little garden at Passy, and thought how happy they might both have been if he had been less prudent, if he had obeyed the impulses of his heart, instead of the hard axioms of the worldly-wise. The time and the opportunity were past and gone, and he felt that some part of his own youth and hope had gone with them.

He made his appearance at Spa when Mrs. Jerningham and Mrs. Colton had been at that pleasant watering-place for more than a month, and he was received somewhat coldly by the younger lady, who could not forgive him for doing his duty as editor of the *Areopagus*. But she soon melted. It was not possible that she should long conceal the delight she felt in his presence.

"I am angry with myself for being so glad to see you," she cried at last; "but, oh, you cannot imagine how dull and hopeless my life has been in this place! My poor aunt likes the humdrum gaiety, and the nauseous waters, and the dawdling drives, and the Tauchnitz novels; and I have stayed to please her. But more than once I have been tempted to take the train for Liége, and offer myself as a novice at the first convent I came to after leaving the station. Why should I not go into a

convent, or at least a béguinage? What use am I in the world?"

Hereupon Mr. Desmond had to reiterate the old protestations, to the effect that the lady's friendship was the pride and happiness of his life, and that to him, at least, she was a person of supreme importance—the very pole-star, or guiding influence, of his life; and then, after speaking to her with great warmth and kindness, he began to lecture her a little upon the emptiness of her existence.

"You would not be so foolish as to imagine these things, if you were more employed, Emily," he said.

"How shall I employ myself?" asked the lady, with an incredulous laugh. "Shall I tat? The tatting of our great-grandmothers has come into fashion. I have tried it, and for a little while it seemed really delightful; but there is a time when one gets tired even of that. I have worked screens in Berlin wool with beads—or have begun them; my aunt has a knack of finishing my work. I paint ever so little in water-colours; but after sitting in a damp meadow for two or three hours, exposed to a midsummer sun, the result is only that I hate myself because I am not Creswick. And with music it is the same. The morning-concerts spoil one for amateur music. I devoted last summer to the harmonium—I suppose because there is such a rage for it; but it was like the tatting—there came a stage at which it seemed all weariness. If it were not for my orchids, I think I should go melancholy mad; but for the cultivator of orchids there can be no such thing as satiety until all the forests on the shores of the Amazon have been rifled by exploring botanists."

"Don't you think it just possible you might find a better source of interest even than orchids?" suggested the editor, gravely. "Your fellow-creatures, for instance—a little sympathy for them might not be thrown away."

"You mean that I should turn district visitor, and go about with tracts and packets of tea and sugar," replied the lady listlessly. "My aunt does all that. She is a clergyman's widow, you know, and that kind of thing is very easy to her. My maid goes with her sometimes, and tells me dreadful things about the poor people, as she brushes my hair—the St. Anthony's fires and St. Vitus's dances, and wens and whitlows, and frightful complaints that they suffer from; and really there seems a particular class of diseases that poor people have entirely to themselves, just as if they have a copyright in them, you know. I am sure I am very sorry for the poor creatures; and when there is anything out of the common way, we send money; besides which, our rector knows that my cheque-book is at his service in any emergency. I cannot see that I should do

any particular good by walking about in the hot sun with tracts."

"I dare say, so far as your own parish goes, you and your aunt are ministering angels, my dear Emily; but you see that is a very narrow sphere, and there are people of a higher class than those you help who may have more need of your sympathy."

"If you are going to ask me to be philanthropic, I warn you at once that it is useless," exclaimed the lady, with a little cry of alarm. "I have not the elements of the philanthropist. I do not care the least in the world for woman's rights; and if I had the privilege of an electress to-morrow, I should—what do you call it?—plump unblushingly for the man who could offer me a new orchid. I do not care about female printers or female doctors. I think it very sad that poor seamstresses should work in stuffy rooms until they fade and die; but I can only pity them, and send money to the newspapers for them, or for their survivors. I have not strength of mind enough to be of any practical use to them."

Mr. Desmond sighed. He saw no remedy for the weariness of spirit from which Mrs. Jerningham suffered. Did not Madame de Maintenon complain of a like weariness when she was the envied of all French men and women, thereby drawing upon herself a trenchant and somewhat impious remark from her brother D'Aubigné? She was happier, perhaps, in the old days, before Scarron pitied and married her—the days in which she did or did not share the chamber of Ninon de l'Enclos.

"I do not ask you to take up the human race," said Mr. Desmond, after a pause; "but I think your life is too—pardon me if I say egotistical. If you had more friends—I don't mean visitors; you have plenty of them,—but intimate acquaintance—intimate enough to fly to you in their perplexities, to consult you in their social arrangements, and to—"

"They would only bore me."

"Perhaps; but they would occupy you, they would take you out of yourself; and even when they were dullest and most obnoxious, they would give a keener zest to your hours of solitude. Depend upon it, one must consent to be bored now and then, in order to appreciate the rapture of not being bored. I am sure, Emily, you would be happier if you took a little more interest in the affairs of your neighbours, or if you had more people dependent on your kindness."

"You may be right," returned the lady, listlessly; "but I do not care for my neighbours. I cannot bring myself to sympathize with their serio-comic woes about recalcitrant butlers and flaunting housemaids. Nor have I any dependents whom my kindness could benefit. My father and I were the only poor

members of the family, and there is no one who would care to profit by my prosperity."

What could be said after this? Laurence Desmond felt that this lonely lady's life wanted a something that gives form and purpose to the lives of other women. Existence for Emily Jerningham had been made too easy, and, extremes meeting in this as in all other cases, it was fast becoming difficult. She was like some dowager sultana, wearied of palace and gardens, fountains and slaves, peacocks and birds of paradise. All the ease and luxury of her life palled on her, and that most fatal of moral diseases, discontent, was fast gaining a hold upon her mind. That old story of the greedy apprentice in the pastry-cook's shop is a fable of wide application. The boy fancies he can never be weary of an existence that is all raspberry-tarts and bath-buns; and being let loose in his master's shop, makes himself bilious in a week, and hates the sight of a raspberry-tart ever afterwards.

There had been a time when Miss Jerningham, sadly restricted in all the aspirations of young-ladyhood, had believed that an open account with a West-end milliner, a perfectly appointed barouche for the Park, and a miniature brougham for shopping, must constitute the supreme good of earthly existence; but after half a dozen years' enjoyment of these blessings, she discovered that the most accomplished of milliners, and the most perfect of establishments, cannot give happiness. The toy-villa at Hampton was a place to dream of; but its mistress found the hours intolerably long in those Paradisaic gardens, the evenings unutterably weary in that fairy drawing-room, the drives by Bushey and Richmond, Kingston and Chertsey, very little gayer than the prisoner's tramp in the grim gaol-yard, under surveillance of a hard-visaged warder.

The lady had nothing to do. If she read a volume of a novel, and paid a few visits, or received a few callers, to-day, she could only look forward to another volume, and another visit, or visitor, to-morrow. The days were all alike, and they left no mark behind them. When a year came to an end, Mrs. Jerningham told herself that she was twelve months older than when it began, and that was the sole effect the passage of time could exercise upon her fate.

"It is all very well for Laurence to be happy and active," she said to herself. "He has that odious *Areopagus* to interest him, and the hope of going into parliament by and by. He is getting rich, and has had the excitement of earning his money. He has his social triumphs and his literary successes, the friendship of great men. It is always the same story. *They* have 'the court, camp, church; the vessel and the mart; sword, gown, gain, glory;' and we have only the London Library and Jaques's croquêt."

Mr. Desmond stayed a fortnight at Spa, and then hurried back to the British Isles, being "due" at a ducal palace in the Highlands—a grand old château, romantic as a picture by Gustave Doré. To say that he assured Mrs. Jerningham he had not the faintest expectation of deriving pleasure from this visit, and that he went to Scotland simply because the political interests of the *Areopagus* obliged him to stalk the duke's deer and shoot the duke's grouse, is only to say that he was a *man*.

Within a week from his departure Mrs. Jerningham and her companion also turned their backs upon the romantic Belgian valley. Emily would have liked much to make the return journey under the escort of the editor; but this would have just a little outstepped the bounds of this carefully regulated friendship, and Mr. Desmond was too profoundly versed in the philosophy of his own world to suggest the measure. He knew exactly how much would be permitted to himself and the woman he—had loved, and still hoped to marry; and he adhered closely to the letter of that unwritten law which is Society's Koran.

When autumn was fast fading into the chill gray of early winter, Mr. Desmond came back to town, and resumed his visits at the Hampton villa, where his pleasure and his caprices were studied with affectionate solicitude, but where a good deal was exacted from him in return for this solicitude. If Mrs. Jerningham for her part paid a certain price for Laurence Desmond's friendship, so surely did he for his part pay somewhat heavily for the honour and privilege of the lady's regard.

In plain English, she was jealous. The agony which neither "mandragora nor all the drowsy syrups of the East" can lull to rest was the agony that racked the soul of Emily Jerningham. Little wonder that the pleasures and luxuries of her life palled upon her. There was a poison in her cup which flavoured every joy and embittered every pleasure. All the petty doubts and frivolous misgivings of the jealous mind harassed this lady's quiet days, and tormented her through the slow hours of her wakeful nights. She was miserable when Laurence Desmond was away from her; she was restless and anxious when he was with her. If he were grave, she fancied him bored by her society; if he were especially gay, her demon-familiar suggested that his gaiety might be assumed. She tortured him by her eager curiosity about the manner in which his life was spent when he was away from her. She insulted him by the air of incredulity with which she received his answers. The mention of some beautiful or distinguished woman whom he had met in society sufficed to fan the flame that was always burning.

"Why do you pretend not to admire Laura Courtenay, and why do you give your shoulders that depreciating shrug when you talk of Lady Sylvester?" she would exclaim, with suppressed

anger. "Do you think I am deceived by that kind of thing? You dined at the Sylvesters' four times last season; and you are always dancing attendance upon those Courtenay girls, though you make quite a favour of coming here once a week. I shall ask Laura and Julia Courtenay to stay with me next summer, and then perhaps I shall be honoured by your society."

Of course Mr. Desmond did his uttermost to satisfy the lady's doubts and cheer her spirits; but he found it not a little wearisome to repeat the same protestations, the same assurances, week after week, to very small effect.

"If I could see Emily contented and happy," he said to himself, "I should be the last to count the cost of our friendship; but her tears, and misgivings, and accusations harass and worry me almost beyond endurance."

Nor did Mr. Desmond feel thus without justification. The lady's jealousy might, indeed, be the strongest possible evidence of her affection, but it was an evidence which Laurence Desmond could have gladly dispensed with.

"Surely there must be within the limits of possibility a love that means peace, trust, unselfishness. Is every woman like Emily, exacting, suspicious, insatiable of devotion and protestation, for ever on the watch to discover falsehood and hypocrisy in the man who loves her? Poor girl! I am hard and cruel, perhaps, when I blame her. These doubts and suspicions may be some of the penalties of our position. There can be no true union of hearts where there is a separation of existences. It is all very well to talk sentimental balderdash about the union of souls, the sympathy of minds that think alike, the sighs that are wafted from Indus to the Pole; but, in spite of poetry and metaphysics, real union means the family breakfast-table, the daily dinner, the constitutional walk, the drowsy home-evening when there are no visitors, the summer trip to Switzerland, the quiet, half-tearful talk in the big darkened bedroom when first the faint squeal of babyhood is heard in the family mansion. Out upon Platonic friendship between men and women who have once knelt together at the shrine of Venus! It is a delusion, a mockery, a lie! There is no union except marriage."

This was the shape which Mr. Desmond's reflections were wont to assume after a painful interview with Emily Jerningham. She loved him, and she would fain have believed in his love, but her familiar demon would not allow her so much peace, such pure delight. If Laurence succeeded in convincing her of his truth and devotion to-night, and left her at the gate of her pretty garden, smiling and happy, after a cordial pressure of her soft white hand, it was as likely as not that an hour's solitary promenade and contemplation in the same pretty garden would enable the lady to develop new doubts and misgivings

from her inner consciousness, which would result in a melancholy letter of five or six pages, written that night, and delivered next morning at Mr. Desmond's late breakfast.

Those who knew the editor of the *Trespass*, and knew or guessed his position *auprès de* Mrs. Jerningham, envied and hated him as the most fortunate of literary highflyers. What more could he desire? Had he not the regard of one of the handsomest and best-bred women in London, who would in all probability come in for a princely fortune whenever Jerningham should go off the hooks? Mr. Desmond was the last of men to admit the pinching of the shoe which he wore with so good a grace. No one among his intimates ventured the impertinence of a congratulation; but it was a generally understood thing that he was supremely happy, and that Mrs. Jerningham's friendship was a blessing which he would not have bartered for a kingdom. And while his friends were permitted to suppose this, Laurence Desmond was profoundly miserable.

"How will it end?" he asked himself sometimes; "and will it ever end?"

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS ST. ALBANS.

As an individual who, by arduous and unremitting labour—by the sweat of his brow and the ceaseless working of his brain—had contrived to secure for himself a decent income in the present and a moderate provision for the future, Mr. Desmond was of course a fitting mark for the arrows of that free-lance of modern civilization—the begging-letter writer. Men and women whose faces he had never seen wrote him pitiful letters, or impudent letters, as the case might be, urging requests which, if all or even half of them had been granted, would speedily have left him penniless. That he should have those of his own kith or kin—that he should have personal friends, or benefactors of the past with powerful claims upon him in the present—that he should have obligations to discharge, or debts to pay, or artistic tastes to gratify, never entered the heads of these poor needy people. His name and address were in the Directory, and he was supposed to be tolerably well off; so there was no more to do but to procure a sheet of paper and a penny stamp, and entreat of him the loan or donation of any given number of pounds, from five to a hundred.

These applications were as painful to Mr. Desmond as such applications must always be to a man who has power to feel the extent of human want and wretchedness around and about him, without the power to relieve it. He read the piteous letters with a sigh, and passed them over to his sub-editor, who answered

every appeal with the same polite formula. Laurence Desmond was not a hard man, however, and to an appeal that came from an old friend or fellow-worker he never turned a deaf ear.

Such an appeal came to him one dull wintry morning after his return from the ducal château in Scotland. Among his letters there was a very painful one from Mrs. Jerningham, with the usual jealous murmurs, the oft-repeated complaints of neglect. This he read with a thoughtful brow, and laid aside with a sigh so heavy as to be almost a groan.

"I am tired of protestation and justification," he said to himself; "there must be an end of these letters. If she doubts my truth because I spend half a dozen days without going to her, she can have little power to appreciate the unselfishness of my regard in the three long years in which I have made myself her slave. There must come an end to a bondage that is intolerable to me, and only a source of unhappiness to her."

The rest of Mr. Desmond's letters, with one exception, were on business connected with his journal. This one exception was a letter addressed in a hand that was very familiar to him.

"My old coach, Tristram Alford!" he cried, as he tore open the envelope. "I wonder how the poor fellow has been getting on since the old days at Henley, when Max Waldon, Frank Lawsley, and I were there with our boat, reading for 'Greats.' I suppose he has been writing a book, or doing a translation of a Greek tragedy, and wants me to give him a lift. It's a long time since I've heard anything of him."

This was the tutor's letter :—

"My dear Desmond,—If I had not already tested and proved the goodness of your heart when I appealed to you some three or four years since for a loan,—which I then hoped would have been of a temporary character, but which, I regret to remember, has not yet been liquidated,—I should not now venture to address you as a suppliant.

"The favour which I am now about to ask is not of a pecuniary kind, and it is a favour which will be very easy for you to grant. You remember my little girl Lucy, who was so fond of your dogs and boats, and who used to sit listening with open eyes and mouth when we were construing *Sophocles*. The little rogue had an innate love of the drama, and performed the part of Electra with a metal tea-pot in a most affecting manner. Well, my dear boy, that inborn dramatic taste, which showed itself when the child was in pinafores, has grown with her growth; and when old enough to consider the question of getting her own living,—the generous-minded child being sensitively averse to remaining a burden to me,—she decided on becoming an actress.

"I need scarcely inform you, my dear Desmond, that such an

idea was to me, at the first blush, absolute HORROR; but when my sweet girl urged her predilection for the drama, and reminded me of the handsome fortunes realized by Garrick, Mrs. Siddons, Miss O'Neill, and other professors of that classic art, I relented, and allowed Lucy to have her own way. The dear girl had educated herself and reared herself, as it were, with so little help from me, that it would have seemed ill in me to frustrate her hopes by my cold reasoning or timid doubts. Nor had I any very agreeable alternative to offer her. My circumstances have year by year become more embarrassed since that pleasant summer we spent together at Henley, and the home which I can provide for my only child is of the poorest. Was I, then, to stand in the way of her advancement?

"To make a long story short, I yielded, and have since that time devoted my best energies to my dear girl's service. She is but nineteen, and has already appeared at the Theatres Royal, Stony Stratford, Market Deeping, Oswestry, and Stamford, with considerable success. Her sympathies are with the buskin rather than with the sock; but at Oswestry she performed the part of Lady Teazle, and received much applause from an appreciative, although somewhat limited, audience.

"We have now essayed a bolder venture. My Lucy has obtained, with inordinate difficulty, a London engagement. I had, in my ignorance of the dramatic world, fondly imagined that a young person of unmistakeable genius had only to apply to the manager of one of the patent theatres, in order to be placed at once upon the boards that Siddons trod. But I find, alas! that in most cases it is only after years of patient and ill-paid drudgery in small provincial towns the dramatic aspirant works his or her way to the metropolis,—nay, indeed, there are many who never reach that splendid goal, but who journey through life as the favourite actor of the Theatre Royal, Market Deeping or Oswestry, and who are not ill-pleased with their renown.

"But to return. My daughter's engagement will be a brief one; but she is to appear in a wide range of the drama, in conjunction with Mr. Henry de Mortemar, a gentleman of some local celebrity, though as yet unknown to the metropolitan critics. The theatre is an obscure one, and Lucy must speedily return to the drudgery of a provincial stage unless some powerful and friendly hand shall be interposed in her behalf. Yours, my good friend, is the influence which I would solicit for my dear child. A word from you would doubtless immediately secure a profitable engagement at one of the West-end theatres. I beseech you, for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' to say that all-powerful word, and to confer a lasting obligation on your poor old friend and tutor,

"TRISTRAM ALFORD.

"*Paul's Terrace, Islington, Nov.* 14, 186—."

"Poor Alford!" murmured the editor, somewhat touched by the earnestness of this appeal. "So he has allowed his daughter to go on the stage, and cherishes the fond delusion that she must needs be a Siddons or an O'Neill, because she has a childish fancy for gas-lamps and spangled petticoats. Yes, I remember the little girl—an angular chit in brown holland; a nice little girl, I think she was, with pretty, dreamy, blue eyes, and shy, childish ways, but an embryo blue-stocking, nevertheless. I have a faint recollection of her playing at Electra with the tea-pot one night, when she did not know that Waldon and I were looking at her. Well, I'll do all I can. The West-end managers are *tant soit peu difficile* now-a-days; but as the *Areopagus* comes down rather savagely upon the modern drama and its professors now and then, they may strain a point to oblige me. I suppose the most friendly way of going to work would be to call on poor Alford."

When his morning's work was over, Mr. Desmond took a hansom from the nearest stand, and rattled up to the topmost heights of Islington, where, after considerable difficulty and aggravating waste of time, the cabman found Paul's Terrace, a shabby little row of newly built houses, on the road to Ball's Pond. The tutor, whom Mr. Desmond remembered the occupant of a pretty cottage near Henley, must indeed have fallen upon evil fortunes.

"Mr. Halford 'ave just stepped hout," said a grimy-looking servant-girl who opened the door; "but he won't be gone long, sir; which Miss Sent Halbans is in the parlour. P'r'aps you'd like to wait?"

"Well, yes, I think I had better wait," replied the editor, disinclined to sacrifice his afternoon without benefit to his old friend.

The girl opened a door, and admitted Mr. Desmond into a very small parlour, powerfully perfumed with stale tobacco, and occupied by a young lady, who was standing by the window, with a little book in her hand.

This must of course be the Miss St. Albans of whom the servant had spoken,—a visitor or hanger-on of the old tutor, perhaps. Laurence Desmond wondered how Mr. Alford came to burden himself with a visitor, and how the visitor came by so fine a name.

Miss St. Albans was a fair-haired young lady, with a slight, girlish figure, and one of those faces which some people call "sweetly pretty," and some only "interesting,"—a tender, winning countenance, with soft blue eyes and lovely mouth, but without the splendour of complexion and feature which attract universal admiration and secure immediate attention. Nor was this young lady's appearance rendered striking by the art of milliner or mantua-maker. Upon her person, as upon the room

she occupied, poverty had set its stamp. She wore a brown merino dress that had seen much service, and her head-dress was of the most unsophisticated order, consisting only of a small forest of curl-papers.

Mr. Desmond wondered to behold this exploded style of head-gear, and wondered still more at the manner of the young person, who started and blushed at sight of him, and then came towards him, with a certain hesitation and timidity that were not unpleasing.

"Mr. Desmond, I think?" she faltered.

"Yes, my name is Desmond."

"Ah," murmured the damsel in curl-papers, somewhat regretfully, "I see you have quite forgotten me."

"Forgotten you! I don't think that could have been possible, if I had ever had the honour to know you, Miss St. Albans," replied the editor, smiling very kindly; for there was something in the girl's candid and yet modest demeanour which pleased this *blasé habitué* of West-end drawing-rooms.

"*If* you had ever known me!" cried the young lady, reproachfully. "Then you have quite forgotten Henley, and our boat, and Champion, the Scotch terrier, and——"

"Not at all. I have a lively recollection of Henley and of Champion; but I cannot recall the name of St. Albans."

"Ah, no, I forgot that the name is strange to you. But I must be very much altered since those happy days, or you would scarcely have forgotten Lucy."

"Lucy—Lucy Alford!"

"Yes, Mr. Desmond. The Lucy to whom you used to be so kind."

"Was I kind? You are very good to think so. And you are really Miss Alford, my dear old tutor's daughter?" Let me shake hands in token of our renewed friendship. Yes, I have a vague recollection of a very nice little girl, who had the prettiest blue eyes, and wore the cleanest holland pinafores in Christendom; and I am quite charmed to behold the same young lady, now she has outgrown the pinafores, but not the eyes."

"You have only a vague recollection of me; yet I knew you directly you stepped out of the cab," said the girl, in a tone of disappointment.

"Yes, but you are more changed than I, Miss Alford. You must consider what a gulf there is between seven and nineteen; while there is not much outward difference between twenty-three and thirty-five. Thirty-five is only so much dustier, and grayer, and shabbier; like a garment that has been worn and faded by continued hard wear."

"Indeed you do not look worn and faded," said the tutor's daughter, with an involuntary glance at the hot-house flower in the fashionable editor's faultless overcoat.

"I received a letter from your father this morning, Miss Alford; and I thought my best course would be to answer it in person. I am all the more happy to attend to my old friend's request because your interests are involved in it."

Lucy blushed again—not the blush of self-consciousness or coquetry, but the honest red of innocent gratitude and impulsive feeling.

"It was very, very kind of you to come," she said. "Papa has told me how valuable your time is, and what a high position you hold on the press. He had no idea that you would respond so quickly to his appeal; and—and I am sure I ought to apologize for receiving you in these horrible curl-papers. They are for Pauline."

"For Pauline!"

"Yes, I play Pauline to-night in the *Lady of Lyons*, you know; and she is always played in ringlets—I don't exactly know why."

"Pray do not apologize for the curl-papers. I know there is a prejudice against them: but I really think them becoming in your case. And so you play Pauline to-night? I remember seeing Helen——"

"Oh, please don't!" cried the girl, with a pretty look of piteous supplication; "every one says that. 'My dear,' the ladies at the theatre say to me, 'I have seen Miss Faucit in that character; and, without wishing to wound your feelings, I am bound to tell you that if you knew how *she* played the cottage-scene you would go home and cut your throat.' At least that's what Mrs. M'Grudder, who plays old women on the Oswestry circuit, said to me after—after I came off, so pleased at having been applauded."

"The old harridan! I suppose she is a very great actress herself, this Mrs. M'Grudder."

"Oh, no; she speaks the broadest, broadest Scotch; and in Lady Macbeth the boys in the gallery laugh at her dreadfully."

"Then I do not think you need be made unhappy by that lady's sneers. Are you very fond of acting?"

"I love it dearly, and I hope some day to get on, for papa's sake. But I find the life of an actress much harder than I thought, and it is very difficult to get on. And I am so nervous."

"You are afraid of your audience?"

"Oh, no, I don't so much mind them; it is of the other actors and actresses I am most afraid."

"Indeed."

"Yes; they come to the wings and watch me; and then they tell me what they think; and they give me advice; and somehow they always contrive to make me miserable. I am sure sometimes, when I have been playing Ophelia, and have been

quite carried away by the part, fancying that I have loved a prince and been forsaken by him, and that my father has been killed, and I am mad, I have happened to look towards the prompt entrance and see Mrs. M'Grudder standing there staring at me in her dreadful stony way, and have heard her say, 'St—st—st!' quite loud, and it has made me break down directly. You see, most actors and actresses have been a long time in the profession, and they have a kind of prejudice against amateurs and novices, and try to put them down. Mrs. M'Grudder had two daughters in the theatre, who both wanted to play the juveniles, and I suppose that's what makes her unkind to me."

"But I suppose you have done with Mrs. M'Grudder now you have come to London?"

"Oh, no, I fear not. My engagement at the Oxford Road Theatre is only for a fortnight. Mr. Mortemar has taken the house at his own risk, you know, in order to introduce himself to a London public; and when the season is over, I must go back to the country—and most likely to the Oswestry circuit—unless I can get a permanent engagement in town."

She glanced at Mr. Desmond when she said this, as much as to say, "You are the all-powerful benefactor who can procure for me that inestimable boon."

Laurence Desmond understood the meaning of that look, and replied to its appeal.

"If any influence of mine can get you the engagement you want, you shall not be long without it," he said, kindly. "I don't think you'll find any Mrs. M'Grudders at the Pall Mall or the Terence."

Mr. Alford came in while Laurence was saying this. He was an elderly man, and he looked older than he was, by reason of the whiteness of his straggling locks, and the stooping attitude which had become habitual to his tall frame. He was a man who bore upon him the unmistakeable stamp of gentle blood—a man whose good breeding no shabbiness of attire could disguise; and it must be confessed that he was very shabby.

"My dear Desmond," he cried, delighted to recognize his old pupil, "this is more than kind! I expected kindness from you, but not such promptitude as this."

"I should be very ungrateful if I were otherwise than prompt, when I remember how well you pulled me through when I was reading for 'Greats' twelve years ago," answered Laurence, heartily. "Miss Alford and I have renewed our old acquaintance, and have become very confidential. I have pledged myself to do my uttermost on her behalf, and if a West-end engagement is her supreme desire, I think I can promise to gratify her wishes through my kind friend Hartstone, of the Theatre Royal, Pall Mall. But I cannot promise to secure her such characters

as Pauline or Ophelia. Hartstone is one of the best fellows in Christendom, but he will think he does a good deal for friendship if he gives Miss Lucy some pretty little young-ladylike part in a *lever du rideau*."

And hereupon Miss Alford murmured that to appear at the Pall Mall would be the honour and delight of her existence, however insignificant the character she might be permitted to perform. After this Mr. Desmond and his old tutor entered upon a very pleasant conversation about the coaching days at Henley, and the three jolly young fellows who had boated and read with Laurence at the Henley villa.

"Poor Max Waldon was ploughed," said the editor. "He was asked who Saul was. 'Which Saul?' asked Max, in that sweetly calm way of his; 'Saul of Tarsus?' 'No, sir; King Saul,' replied the examiner, sternly. 'Oh,' said Max, 'he was not a bad sort of a fellow, only he had a nasty trick of throwing javelins at one.' And they ploughed him; but he is doing wonders at the Equity bar, notwithstanding. Lawsley died at Pau the year after he took his degree; and I fear the 'Varsity training and pedestrianism had something to do with the decline that carried him off."

The reminiscences of the Long Vacation seemed by no means unpleasant to Lucy Alford. She took up her work—it was Pauline's bridal veil that she was patching and darning for the evening's performance—and sat quietly by while her father and his pupil talked; but every now and then her face kindled, and she looked up with a smile that meant, "I too remember that."

Mr. Desmond had been sitting in the shabby little lodging-house parlour a long time, when he stole a look at his watch, and was surprised to discover the lateness of the hour.

"I should like to see you play Pauline to-night, Miss Alford," he said, as he shook hands with his tutor's daughter.

Lucy blushed, and looked at her father.

"The *Market Deeping Examiner* compared her to Helen Faucit, Desmond, and I doubt if any lady except Miss Faucit could touch Lucy's Pauline."

"Papa, how can you say such things!" cried the girl. "Please do not laugh at him, Mr. Desmond. I like the part of Pauline so much, and—and I should like you to be in the theatre to-night, only I know you will make me nervous."

"What! do you place me in the same category as Mrs. M'Grudder?"

"O no, no, no! Only——"

"Only what?"

"I should be so anxious to please you; and the more I wished to please you, the more nervous I should be."

"I suppose that is the penalty I am to pay for my editorial

position. Very well, Miss Alford, I shall not say whether I am coming to the theatre to-night; but look out for the *Areopagus* next Saturday morning, and——"

"And expect a washing," cried the old tutor, rejoicing in the 'Varsity slang.

"Good-bye, Miss Lucy," said Laurence, lingering over these adieux just a little more than was necessary. "Oh, by the way, I have not had the pleasure of seeing your friend Miss St. Albans after all. Is she too a member of the dramatic profession?"

Mr. Alford and his daughter laughed heartily at this question.

"The girl has one requisite for comedy if she can laugh like that on the stage," thought the editor.

"I am Miss St. Albans," said Lucy; "St. Albans is my stage name, you know. I really thought you understood that just now."

"Not at all; I fully believed in Miss St. Albans as a separate entity. And so that is your *nom de théâtre!*—rather a high-sounding name, is it not?"

Mr. Alford blushed.

"Well, my dear boy, they like fine names, you see," he explained, "the managers and the public. In point of fact, they will have something that looks well in the play-bills. St. Albans —De Mortemar: of course the more enlightened public are aware that those are not real names; but they go down, my dear Desmond, they go down."

"I can only hope that the happiness of Miss Alford may be promoted by the success of Miss St. Albans," said the editor of the *Areopagus*, as he made his farewell bow to the young lady in curl-papers.

Mr. Alford accompanied him to the street-door, and apologized for his inability to invite his old pupil to dinner.

"The world has not used me too well, Desmond, as you must perceive," he said; "and yet I have worked my hardest. I have a couple of tragedies in my desk that might conduce to the revival of original dramatic literature in this country; but the ignorance and prejudice of theatrical managers are not easily overcome. I look to my daughter's genius to elevate the English stage. She is a star, my dear Desmond—a newly-risen star; but one that will shine far and wide before long, if she has a chance. Go and see her to-night at the Oxford, and you will find that her poor old father does not exaggerate her merits."

"Yes, I will go," answered Laurence, smiling at the old man's enthusiasm. "You must let me give you this, Alford, to—to make things a little pleasanter while you stay in town, for 'auld lang syne.'"

It was a cheque for twenty pounds in his friend's favour, which Mr. Desmond contrived to crush into the old man's hand as he

said this. He was gone before Tristram Alford could find time to thank him or remonstrate with him; but the help thus offered by friendship was too sweet to be rejected by pride, nor was Tristram Alford a man who had ever cherished that particular sin amongst the deadly seven. There were tears—grateful tears—in the old man's eyes when he went back to his daughter.

"That noble-hearted fellow has given me twenty pounds, Lucy," he said; "we can rub on comfortably for the next six weeks."

To "rub on comfortably" had been Mr. Alford's highest notion of financial prosperity for the last thirty years. He was a man upon whom the burden of youthful debts, the penalties of juvenile indiscretion, had pressed so heavily as to frustrate every attempt at progress in the race of life. Poor at school, poor at college, poor in youth, and poor in middle age, Tristram Alford had come at last to accept Poverty as a fellow-traveller, whose companionship must needs be endured to the end of the troublesome journey. The utmost he asked of Providence was a brief interval of rest and refreshment at some wayside inn, while his companion of the chain waited for him at the door.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE GREEN-ROOM.

It happened that the day on which Mr. Desmond paid his visit to Paul's Terrace, Islington, was a day unmarked by any particular engagement. There had been a time when he was only too glad to snatch such a day for a quiet afternoon at the Hampton villa; but he no longer felt the same alacrity when the occasion offered itself. He was still fully alive to the fact that Mrs. Jerningham was one of the handsomest and most elegant women he had ever seen, and that to be preferred by her was an honour; but to be submitted to the slow torture of the domestic inquisition is none the less painful because the inquisitor-in-chief is a beautiful woman, from whose fair lips the victim had hoped to hear sweet words instead of captious questionings and ungenerous reproaches.

Thus did it come to pass that Mr. Desmond, having no imperative claim on his leisure, found himself at the doors of the Oxford Road Theatre, within two or three hours of his visit to Mr. Alford's lodging. He had eaten a hurried dinner at his club, and had driven thence to the Oxford, which house of entertainment was to be found amidst a labyrinth of streets northward of Cumberland Gate.

It is not a fashionable theatre, but amongst the inhabitants of the immediate district it is at times a very popular resort; while there are other times in which this temple of the drama

fades and languishes for lack of public patronage, in common with more brilliant temples of the same order. It is a theatre whose normal splendour is ever and anon brightened by the extra brilliancy of some wandering star, whose name, all renowned though it may be in the district, is comparatively unknown to the ears of fashionable play-goers, or known only as a bye-word and a reproach.

The great T. N. Buffboote, better known to his admirers as Brayvo Buffboote, is a favourite at the Oxford. Miss Marian Fitz-Kemble, the celebrated lady Lear, here performs her round of tragedy, from Macbeth to Julius Cæsar, with much satisfaction to herself and her friends. Here has the famous Transatlantic equestrian, best known to fame as the divine Miss Godiva Jones, pranced and galloped in her celebrated performances of Dick Turpin and Timour the Tartar. Here in the summer months, when the closing of West-end theatres affords a brief respite to manager and company, there come occasionally actors and actresses of higher repute, eager to gather new laurels in these untrodden regions, and not ill pleased to find themselves received with noisy rapture and outspoken admiration by the ruder gods and homelier goddesses of a threepenny gallery.

But while stars may come and stars may go at the Oxford Road Theatre, there is a regular company which goes on for ever, glad to be tragical with Miss Fitz-Kemble, melodramatic with the great Buffboote, or equestrian with the divine Godiva, as the case may be—a company which takes life as it comes, and asks no more from existence than that its swift-recurring Saturday shall witness the payment of every man's salary.

Urged by the promptings of a fiery and ambitious soul, Mr. de Mortemar had been induced to take the Oxford Road Theatre at the very deadest and dullest time of the year—that dreary pause in the theatrical season which precedes the glory of Boxing-day—that fag-end of the year, during which the combined forces of a Macready and a Charles Mathews would scarcely suffice to illumine the profound darkness that foreshadows the rising of that brilliant luminary, the genuine face-distorting, policeman-overturning, baby-squashing, red-hot-poker-brandishing, parcel-snatching, crinoline-flourishing Christmas clown—that wonder of wit and humour, who convulses his audience by asking them what they had for dinner the day after to-morrow, or by some sarcastic inquiry about a missing fourpenny-piece.

Mr. de Mortemar had a soul above such small considerations as good or bad seasons. He had that within him which whispered that wherever the English language was spoken there must be an audience able to comprehend and admire his render-

ing of Hamlet and Romeo, Master Walter and Claude Melnotte, Alfred Evelyn, Charles Surface, John Mildmay, Citizen Sangfroid, Miles na Coppaleen, Sir Charles Coldstream, and Paul Pry.

In *these* few characters Mr. de Mortemar (*né* Morris) felt himself unapproachable. Other provincial stars might pretend to a wider range of character; the modest De Mortemar only sought to surpass a Kean in Hamlet, a Gustavus Brooke in Master Walter, a Macready in Lear, a Charles Mathews in Coldstream, a Wigan in John Mildmay, a Boucicault in the faithful Miles, and a Wright in the inquisitive Paul. This much he felt that he could do, and he had no greedy desire to outstep the limit which liberal Nature had set upon his genius.

"I played a burlesque character of Robson's for my benefit at Market Deeping last year," Mr. de Mortemar remarked to a friend at the little tavern next door to the Oxford Road Theatre; "and the *Deeping Examiner* said that if it were possible I could excel in anything where all was excellence, I did excel in burlesque. But I don't care to make my mark in London as a burlesque actor. A man can't help it if Nature made him versatile, you see, Tommy; but there's some kind of principle in these things, and what Edmund Kean wouldn't have done, I won't do. That 's my principle, and I mean to stick to it."

"And so I would, Morty, if I was you. Whatever Teddy Kean could do, you can do," replied the humble Pylades. "And I 'll take another glass of bitter, if you 'll stand Sam."

"I *have* played clown for my ben," murmured the great De Mortemar; "but, though I drew an enormous house, I felt the injury to my self-respect was poorly paid for by a clear half."

"There ain't nothing you can't do, Morty, from Shylock to a flipflap. That ale 's uncommon hard; I think a six of brandy-and-water warm would do you more good, and wouldn't hurt *me*."

And thus the simple De Mortemar discoursed of the greatness that was in him, while the scantily furnished benches of pit and gallery attested the badness of the season.

"They haven't heard of me yet," said the star, serene even in the hour of disappointment. "London is a large place, and a man can't get a reputation in a week. The metropolitan papers are slow, sir—very slow—to a man who has been accustomed to see a column and a half of criticism written upon every new character performed by him; but they can't afford to leave me unnoticed much longer; and when they do speak, they 'll speak out, depend upon it. I look upon the Oxford Road Theatre as a stepping-stone to Drury Lane, and it was with that view I took it."

Mr. de Mortemar had engaged Miss St. Albans for the heroines of those dramas and comedies in which he intended to shine, not because he believed in her talent—for in plain truth this great

man believed in the existence of no talent except his own—but because she was very young and inexperienced, and he could do as he liked with her; which means, in a dramatic sense, that he could keep her with her back to the audience, in an ignominious corner of the stage, through the greater part of a scene, while he shouted and ranted at her from the centre of the boards; and that he could take her up so sharply at the end of her most telling speeches as to deprive her of that just meed of applause an approving audience might naturally have bestowed upon her, and in bestowing which they would have divided that coronal of glory Mr. de Mortemar desired to obtain for himself alone.

Mr. Desmond found that portion of the boxes playfully entitled the dress-circle in occupation of two young women in scarlet Garibaldi jackets and black velvet head-dresses; one fat elderly lady, in a cap which offered to the eye of the observer a small museum of natural and artistic curiosities in the way of shells, feathers, beads, butterflies, and berries; three warm-looking young men, sprawling and lounging and giggling and whispering amongst themselves in a corner box; and a scanty sprinkling of that class of spectators who come with free admissions, and rarely come prepared for the removal of their bonnets, which removal being rigorously exacted, leaves them wild and haggard of aspect and soured in temper.

Amongst this audience the editor of the *Areopagus* meekly took his place, and prepared to await the rising of the curtain, while a subdued crunching of apples and sucking of oranges, mingled with a chorus of sibilant whisperings, went on round and about him.

Why, in a poorly-filled house, there should always be dispiriting and aggravating delays between the falling and the rising of the act-drop, unknown to a well-attended theatre, is one of the enigmas of theatrical existence only to be solved by the masters of the craft; but it is indisputable that a scanty audience, naturally disposed to be captious and low-spirited, is always rendered more dismal and more captious by heart-sickening intervals of waiting, that would spoil the pleasure of an evening with Edmund Kean, or Charles Mathews, but which, when endured for the sake of a De Mortemar, are exasperating in the highest degree.

During such an interval, Laurence Desmond waited with tolerable patience, entertained by the most hackneyed of waltzes and polkas, performed by a feeble orchestra, before the curtain rose for the third act of the *Lady of Lyons*. The flabby act-drop, with its faded picture, did at last ascend, and, after a little preliminary skirmishing, Miss St. Albans appeared, conducted by the great De Mortemar, who wore a long black cloak, and looked unutterable things at the gallery with his solemn eyes, the

darkness whereof was intensified by very palpable half-circles of Indian ink. Miss St. Albans had very little to do in this scene. She had only to appear bewildered, and a little alarmed by the grooming landlord and servants, and very much in love with the prince. If she had any difficulty in giving expression to such simple sentiments, Mr. de Mortemar saved her from the exhibition of her incompetency, for he contrived to keep her back to the audience throughout the scene, and so stifled and smothered her against his manly breast, that all Mr. Desmond could see of his tutor's daughter was a slender girlish figure robed in white, and a fair head half concealed by the stiff curve of Mr. de Mortemar's encircling arm.

The first scene was short and unimportant; and after it came the cottage-scene—the great scene for Pauline—in which the merchant's haughty daughter finds that her Italian prince is only a self-educated gardener's son, with a mother in a white apron.

Mr. Desmond set himself to watch this scene with a critical eye, for he wished to discover what hope of dramatic success there might be for his old friend's daughter. Well, she was a very pretty, winning girl, and she spoke her lines in a low soft voice, and with a gentle accent which stamped her as of different breeding from the people who acted with her, but—but she was not a genius; or if in her soul there was by chance some spark of the divine fire, it was choked and obscured by the smoke of her surroundings, and had yet to kindle into flame. She spoke her pretty poetical speeches, and wept, and trembled, and covered her face at the right moment; but she was only a timid young actress trying to act. She was not the Demoiselle Deschappelles—proud, loving, passionate, and maddened by the cheat that had been put upon her. The supreme exaltation of mind, the positive intoxication of the intellect, which constitutes great acting, had not yet come to her. She was timid, self-conscious, nervously anxious to please her audience, and secure the reward of a little hand-clapping and feet-stamping from pit and gallery, when she should have been stung almost to madness by the sense of outraged faith and love abused, as unconscious of spectators as Ariadne at Naxos, or Dido on her funeral pyre.

But if Miss St. Albans was not yet an actress, it is to be remembered that she was only nineteen years of age, and had had little more than a twelvemonth's experience or practice of an art which is perhaps amongst the most difficult and exacting of all arts, and which has no formulæ whereby the student may arrive at some comprehension of its mysteries. It is an art that is rarely taught well, and very often taught badly; an art which demands from its professors a moral courage, and an expenditure of physical energy, intellectual power, and emotional feeling

demanded by no other art; and when a man happens to be endowed with those many gifts necessary to perfection in this art, he is spoken of in a patronizing tone as "only an actor;" and it is somewhat a matter of wonder that he should be "received in society."

"She is very young," thought Mr. Desmond, when the act-drop had fallen on Pauline's passion and Claude's remorse, and when the star had been recalled by three particular friends in the pit, and one shrill boy in the gallery. "She is very young, and she is pretty and interesting, and might learn to be a good actress, if there were any school in which she could be taught. But to act with such a conventional ranter and tearer as this De Mortemar, would be destruction to an embryo Siddons. This girl seems eminently sympathetic, and is of the stuff that makes our Faucits and Herberts; but where is she to get the right training?—that is the question.

Mr. Desmond kept his place patiently throughout the third and fourth acts of the drama, though the dreary blank between the two acts was a sharp test of man's capacity for suffering. He saw Pauline come downstairs to breakfast, in her smart bridal-dress of lace and satin, to go through all those phases of pride and anger, tenderness and yielding love, which form the crucial test of the young tragédienne's power and genius; and after the curtain had fallen upon Pauline, the subjugated and devoted, Laurence Desmond left the apple-munchers, and whisperers, and gigglers of the dress-boxes to their own devices, and departed, with the intention of penetrating to those mysterious regions which lie behind the boundary-line of the foot-lights.

To an ordinary individual the stage-door of the Oxford Road Theatre might have been an impassable barrier; but the name of the *Areopagus* was an "open sesame," against which no stage-door keeper could afford to shut his eyes. The stage-door keeper was not a reader of the popular literary journal, but he had a vague notion that the *Areopagus* was a paper affected by swells, and that it sometimes came down heavily upon the great ones of the dramatic world, whose genius no meaner organ dared gainsay. To the editor of such a periodical, Mr. de Mortemar would, of course, desire to be civil; and the door-keeper admitted Mr. Desmond, after having submitted him to a sharp scrutiny, or, in his own phraseology, "taken stock of him, to make sure as he was none of them milingtary coves a-tryin' it on to get behind, and hang about the place a-talking to Mamsell Pasdebasque, which she ought to know better."

Mr. Desmond had never before been behind the scenes of the Oxford Road Theatre, but he had run the gauntlet of the West-end houses; and except that the passages and stairs in the

Oxford Road Theatre were a shade or so darker, and dingier, and dirtier, and a little more eminently adapted for the spraining of ankles and the breaking of necks, the Oxford Road was as other theatres.

After some groping and stumbling in the wrong passages and on the wrong stairs, the editor made his way to the green-room. He could scarcely have told himself why he took this trouble in order to say a few kind words to his old tutor's daughter, or whether the saying of kind words was at all required from him. It may be that, having given up his evening to this visit to the Oxford Road Theatre, he came behind the scenes merely because he could no longer endure the dreary misery of the boxes; or it may be that he wanted to observe the manners and customs of actors of a different class from those he had been accustomed to meet. Mr. Desmond, however, did not trouble himself with any consideration of his motive. He came to the green-room to see Miss Alford, or Miss St. Albans, because it was the humour of the moment to come. He had given himself an evening's holiday from the ever-alternating labours of literary and social life, and he was not sorry to lose the sense of his own cares and perplexities amongst strange surroundings.

The green-room was a long narrow slip of a room underground, furnished with a few shabby chairs and benches, some flaring gas-lamps, and a cheval-glass, before which the actors and actresses contemplated themselves afresh after every change of costume, more or less pleased with the result of their scrutiny.

Mr. Desmond found his friend's daughter standing before this glass, arranging the scanty festoons of a black tulle ball-dress, dotted about with little bunches of violets—a dress that Mademoiselle Deschappelles could by no possibility have worn at any period of her existence, but which poor Lucy Alford fondly believed was the exact thing for the last act.

"How do you do, once more, Miss—St. Albans?" said the editor, going up to the glass.

"How do you do, Mr. Desmond?" the girl said, startled, and blushing brightly beneath the artificial pallor which marked the mental agonies of Pauline. "I—I didn't think you'd come behind; it is not generally allowed, you know; but of course with you it's different. I saw you in the dress-circle. How kind of you to come! But it made me so nervous."

"Yes, I could see that you were nervous."

"You could see it! I am sorry for that!" said Lucy, just a little mortified.

"My dear young lady, if you were not nervous, you would not be of the sensitive stuff that makes an artist."

"You—you were not displeased with me?"

What could he say when she asked this question?—in falter-

ing, pleading tones, that seemed to say, "Oh! for pity's sake, give me a word of praise, or I shall die at your feet." What could he say, when the soft blue eyes looked up to him with such a beseeching expression? Could he be candid, and reply, "You are at present the kind of actress whom the coarse-minded critic calls 'a stick:' your idea of Pauline Deschappelles is a schoolgirl's notion, without force, or depth, or passion; but when you are ten years older, and have thought, and suffered, and studied, and have lost all the youthful beauty which now enables you to look the part, you may possibly be able to act it?"

Instead of this, Mr. Desmond fenced the question with diplomatic art.

"It gave me great pleasure to see you act," he said; "and you looked charming. I think fortune is a great deal too kind to Claude in giving him such a lovely and devoted wife after his shabby conduct."

"Do you like Mr. de Mortemar?" asked Lucy, delighted by the small meed of praise conveyed in this artful speech.

"Well, not very much," replied Laurence, smiling; "he is not exactly my style."

"And yet he was such an enormous favourite at Market Deeping," said Lucy, opening her eyes to their widest extent. "But, to tell you the real truth, I do not very much admire him myself; only I wouldn't say so to any one except you for the world, as it was so very good of him to give me a London engagement."

"It is not very good of him to keep you in a corner of the stage all through your best scenes."

"Yes, that is a disagreeable way he has; but I don't think he knows when he does it."

"Oh, yes, my dear Miss St. Albans, depend upon it he knows very well. Ah, here he is."

Mr. de Mortemar entered the green-room with his grandest tragedy stalk. He had been informed of Mr. Desmond's visit.

"They have heard of me already," he said to himself. "Perhaps the *Areopagus* will be the first to speak out. I knew they couldn't afford to continue their vile attempt to crush me by silence. They have been paid—bribed by some London actors whose names I could mention—to keep my fame from the public. But there must come a time when they will find it dangerous for their own reputation to play that game any longer. They attempted to crush Kean, and they are attempting to crush me. But they will find it even harder work to destroy me than they found it to destroy poor little Ted."

This is what Mr. de Mortemar told his friends, whom he rarely entertained with any other topic than his own triumphs, past, present, and future; and this is what he told himself. Im-

pressed with this conviction, he approached Mr. Desmond, and introduced himself to that gentleman with the air of a man who confers a favour, and who is fully aware of the fact.

"I saw you in the boxes during the third and fourth acts," he said, in his grand, high-tragedy manner. "You could scarcely have chosen your time better for forming a fair judgment of my Claude. I do not consider it one of my *great* parts, though my friends are pleased to tell me that I have left William Charles Macready some distance behind in my rendering of that character. You were, no doubt, struck by some points which are not only new to the stage, but which go a step or two beyond the original meaning of the author. As, for instance, at the close of the third act, where, instead of the ordinary, 'Ho, my mother!'—a mere commonplace summons to a parent who is desired to come downstairs—I have adopted the heavy sigh of despair: 'Oh, my mother!'—expressive of Claude's remorseful consciousness that he has disregarded the widow's very sensible advice in the first act. This reading opens up—if I may be permitted to say so—long vistas of thought, and also gives an importance and an elevation to the character of the Widow Melnotte, for which the lady performing that part can scarcely be sufficiently grateful. 'Oh, my mother! Oh, my second self, my guide, my counsellor, by whose sustaining wisdom I might have escaped my present degradation and despair!' All that, I flatter myself, is implied in the sigh and the gesture which I introduce at this point. Subtle, is it not?"

"Extremely subtle," said Laurence; "you must have studied the German critics, Mr. de Mortemar? There is a profundity in your ideas that reminds me of Schlegel."

"No, sir; I have studied *this*," replied the tragedian, thumping the breast of his green-cloth coat, whereon glittered the tinfoil crosses and spangled stars which the soldier of the Republic was supposed to have won for himself in Italy. "I have drawn my inspiration from my own heart, sir; and I am the less surprised when I find that the fire that burns *here* is quick to kindle an electric spark in the breasts of other men. The people of Market Deeping will tell you who and what I am, sir, if you can take the trouble to interrogate them. There are some there, sir, who know what good acting is, and who know how to appreciate a great actor. In London, you seem not to want great actors. The age of your Garricks and your Kembles is past; and when new Garricks and Kembles arise, you shut the doors of your principal theatres in their faces, and do your best to ignore them, or to write them down in your newspapers. But this kind of thing cannot last for ever, sir. The voice of the mighty British public is clamorous for a great actor; and you, sir, garble and misrepresent the truth as you may, cannot long interpose

yourself between that mighty public and that great actor. I am, of course, understood to speak in a broad and general sense, sir, and to mean no offence to you in person."

"Of course not. I shall accept all you say in a strictly parliamentary sense, as the Pickwickians did upon a memorable occasion. And believe me, Mr. de Mortemar, when Garrick *redivivus* appears, mine shall not be the pen to dispute his genius. In the meantime the public must be content with—ah, you are called, I see, Mr. de Mortemar."

A grimy-faced boy summoned the hero of the night, and the great De Mortemar was compelled to depart before he had extorted from the editor of the *Areopagus* the smallest modicum of that praise for which his soul hungered.

Mr. Desmond did not find himself alone with Miss St. Albans on the departure of Mr. de Mortemar. An elderly and bloated individual, in a very shabby gray suit of the Georgian era, hovered near, and surveyed the stranger ever and anon with an observant eye—an eye in which there was that watery lustre, by some physiologists supposed to betoken a partiality for strong drinks. Mr. Desmond remembered this gentleman as the parent of Pauline, and perceived in his shabby and faded appearance the decadence of the wealthy merchant of Lyons.

"That's rather a strong case of coals, a'nt it?" inquired this individual, indicating by a turn of his head that the departing De Mortemar was the subject of his discourse.

"A case of coals?" repeated Laurence, doubtfully.

"Yes, coals—nuts—barcelonas. The gorger's awful coally on his own slumming, eh?"

"I really am at a loss—" faltered the bewildered Laurence.

"Don't understand our patter, I suppose?" said M. Deschappelles, with an affable smile. "I mean to say that our friend the manager is rather sweet upon his own acting."

"Well, yes; Mr. de Mortemar appears to have considerable confidence in his own powers."

"Rather! Bless your heart, they're always coming up to London like that, thinking they're going to set the town in a blaze. There was William Harford—Howling Billy, they used to call him on the Northern Circuit—he came to London thinking he was going to put Macready's nose out of joint—and didn't. He was a wicked actor, he was. Satan will have him some day. A man can't go on murdering Shakspeare as Howling Billy did without coming to Satan at last."

"P'line! Deechappells!—Miss St. Albans!—Mr. Jackson!—last scene!" roared the grimy-faced boy at this juncture, and Mr. Desmond was fain to bid his tutor's daughter a brief good-night.

He did not return to the front of the house. He had seen

enough of Miss Alford's acting to enable him to judge very fairly what she could do in the present, and what she might achieve in the future.

"I will try my best to get her out of this wretched school," he said to himself. "I will try to get her away from Mr. de Mortemar and that curious, good-tempered-looking old man, who talked about Satan and Howling Billy. I dare say I can get Hartstone to engage her for the Pall Mall. He wants pretty, lady-like girls for his farces, and gives very liberal salaries; and though she won't get the experience that makes a Helen Faucit, she will at any rate get away from the De Mortemar school. I should like to put her in the right path, for poor old Alford's sake."

CHAPTER XV.

ALPHA AND OMEGA.

THERE were some days on which M. de Bergerac had no work for his secretary, and on such occasions the young man was free to dispose of himself as he pleased. These days Eustace Thorburn devoted partly to reading and meditation, partly to the delightful duty of ministering to Helen's caprices—if, indeed, the word "caprice" can fairly be used in relation to anyone so entirely amiable as Mademoiselle de Bergerac.

Happily for the ambitious hopes of the student, there were some days on which Helen asked no service from her willing slave, and when the slave could find no excuse for intruding on the privacy of his mistress as she read, or practised, or worked in her pretty drawing-room.

On these leisure days Eustace made good progress with his own studies. He cherished the ideas of the ancients as to the requirements of a poet, and thought that whatever was learnt by Virgil should be at least attempted by every student who would fain sacrifice at the shrine of the Muses. On dull days he was wont to spend the morning in his own room, working his hardest; but in fine weather he preferred a solitary ramble in the park, or on the banks of the river, with his own thoughts and a volume of classic prose or poetry for company.

He set out for a day's ramble, one fine, sharp morning in December, at the same hour in which a gentleman arrived at Windsor by the morning express from town.

This gentleman left his luggage and his servant at the station, and set out to walk from Windsor to Greenlands, as Eustace had done about four months before. He was a man of middle size and of middle age, with a slender but muscular form, and a fair patrician face—a face with an aquiline nose and cold, bright-blue eyes that might have belonged to some Danish Viking, but

a face in which the rugged grandeur of the old warrior-blood was tempered by the effeminacy of half a dozen generations of courtiers.

There was an inexpressible languor in the droop of the eyelids, an extreme hauteur in the carriage of the head. The mouth was perfect in its modelling, but the lips had the sensuous beauty of a Greek statue, too feminine in their soft harmonious line, and out of character with the rest of the face.

Such was Harold Jerningham, owner of Greenlands, in Berkshire, and of the bijou house in Park Lane. Fifty-two years of an existence that may be fairly termed exhaustive had left their impress upon him. There were traces of the crow's-foot at the corners of the clear, full blue eyes, and sharp lines across the fair, proud brow. The waving auburn hair was sprinkled ever so lightly with the first snow-flakes of life's winter, and the auburn moustache and beard owed something of their tint to the care of an assiduous valet; but Mr. Jerningham was the kind of man who looks his handsomest at fifty years of age; and there were few faces in foreign Court or ball-room that won more notice than his on those rare occasions on which the *blasé* English traveller condescended to appear in public.

The lively Celts amongst whom Mr. Jerningham made a languid endeavour to get rid of his existence regarded that gentleman as a striking example of the English "spleen," and were prepared to hear at any moment that Sir Jerningham had made an unusually careful toilet that morning, and had then proceeded, with insular frigidity, to cut himself the throat *à la manière Anglaise.*

For the last seven or eight years the world had found no subject for scandal in the life of Harold Jerningham. It seemed as if those wild-oats which he had been sowing, more or less industriously, ever since he left the University must needs be at last exhausted, so quiet, and even studious, was the existence of the gentleman, who appeared now in London, anon in Vienna, to-day in Paris, next week in Norway; and who seemed always to support the burden of his being with the same heroic endurance, and to combine the cold creed of the Stoic with the agreeable practice of the Epicurean.

He had lived for himself alone, and had sinned for his own pleasure; and if his life within the last decade had been comparatively pure and harmless, it was because the bitter apples of the Dead Sea could tempt him no longer by their outward beauty. He was unutterably weary of the inner bitterness, and even the outward beauty had lost its charm. If he had ceased to be a sinner, it was that he was tired of sinning, rather than that he lamented his past offences.

A sudden fancy, engendered out of the very emptiness and

weariness of his brain, had brought him to England, and the same fancy brought him to Greenlands. He wanted to see the old abandoned place, which had echoed with his childish laughter in the days when he could still be amused; the woods that had been peopled by his dreams, in the days when he had not yet lost the power to dream. He wanted to see these things; and, more than these things, he wanted to see the one friend whose society was pleasant, whose friendship was in some wise precious to him.

"I have rather gloried in outraging the prejudices of my fellow-men," he had said to himself sometimes, when anatomizing his own character, in that critical and meditative mood which was habitual to him; "but I believe I should scarcely like Theodore de Bergerac to think ill of me. It is not in me to play the hypocrite, and yet I fancy I have always contrived to keep the darker side of my nature hidden from him."

The master of Greenlands happened to be in an unusually reflective mood, and his reflections of to-day were tinged with a certain despondency. This nineteenth of December was his birthday, the fifty-second anniversary of his first appearance upon the stage of life; and the reflections which the day brought with it were far from pleasant. For the first time in his existence Mr. Jerningham had this morning been struck by the notion that it was a dreary thing to eat a solitary breakfast on the anniversary of his birth, uncheered by the voice of kinsman or friend invoking blessings on his head. The luxurious little dining-room in Park Lane glowed in the ruddy fire-light, and glittered with all the chaste splendour of Mr. Jerningham's art-treasures, as he trifled with his tea and toast, far too tired of all the delicacies of this earth to care for the bloated livers of Strasbourg geese or the savoury flesh of Bayonne pigs. The room in which he had breakfasted, and the table that had been spread for him, formed a picture which a painter of still-life might have dreamed of; but it had seemed very blank and dismal to Harold Jerningham on this particular occasion, when an accidental glance at the date of his *Times* reminded him that his fifty-second year had come to an end.

He resolved forthwith upon a visit to the only friend whose sincerity he believed in, and the only living creature from whose lips good wishes would seem other than a conventionality.

"I suppose it is because I am getting old that such gloomy fancies come into my head," he said to himself, as he walked from the station to Greenlands. "It never struck me before that a childless man's latter days must needs be blank and empty. Must it be so? Which is the lesser of the two evils—to be the father of an heir who languishes for his heritage, or to know that one's lands and houses must pass to a stranger, when

the door of the last narrow dwelling has been sealed upon its silent inhabitant? Who knows? Is not existence at best a choice of evils—and the negative misery is always the lesser Better to suffer the dull sense of loneliness than the sharp agony of ingratitude. Better to be Timon than Lear."

This is how the philosopher argued with himself on his fifty-third birthday, as he walked the lonely road between Windsor and Greenlands.

"Dear old Theodore!" he said to himself; "it is nine years since I have seen him—three or four since I have heard from him. God grant I may find him well—and happy!"

Mr. Jerningham had walked this road often in his boyhood and youth—very often in the days when he had been an Eton boy, and had boldly levanted from his tutor's house, and crossed that purely imaginary boundary, the Thames, for an afternoon's holiday at home, where the horses and dogs and servants seemed alike rejoiced by the presence of the young heir. He had walked the same road at many different periods of his existence, in every one of which his own pleasure had been the chief desire of his heart; not always to be achieved, at any cost, and rarely achieved with ultimate satisfaction to himself.

He had travelled this road in a barouche, one bright summer afternoon, with his handsome young wife by his side, and the bells of three parish-churches ringing their joy-peal in honour of his coming. He remembered what a folly and a mockery the joy-bells had seemed; how very little nearer and dearer his wife's beauty had been to him than the beauty of a picture seen and admired in one hour, to be forgotten in the next.

"I think I was once in love," he said to himself, when he meditated on the mistakes and follies of his past life. "Yes, I believe that I was once in love—fondly, foolishly, deeply in love. But it came to an end—too soon, perhaps. In his youth a man has so many dreams, and the newest always seems the brightest. Well, they are all over—dreams and follies; the end has come at last, and it is rather dreary. I suppose I have no right to complain. I have lived my life. There are men who seem in the very heyday of existence at fifty years of age; but those are not men who have taken life as I have taken it. It is the old story of the candle burnt at both ends. The illumination is very grand, but the candle suffers."

Mr. Jerningham entered the park by that small gate through which Eustace Thorburn had passed six months before. Greenlands was very beautiful, even in this bleak winter weather, but there was a desolation and wildness in its aspect eminently calculated to foster melancholy thoughts. It was by the express wish of the master that the park had been permitted to assume this aspect of wildness and decay. "My good man," he had

said to his bailiff, "I assure you all this trimness and primness, which you make so much fuss about, is to the last degree unnecessary, so far as I am concerned. I shall never again come here to live for any length of time; and when I do come, it pleases me best to come and go as a stranger. Let those poor old dawdling men in the grounds take matters as quietly as they like. You will pay them their wages on Saturday just the same as if they did wonders in the way of sweeping, and pruning, and clipping. I don't want Greenlands to look like a Dutchman's garden; and I am glad to think that there is some kind of use in the world for poor dawdling old men who only excel in the art of not doing things."

The bailiff stared, but he obeyed his master, whose reputation for eccentricity had long been established at Greenlands.

In the chill wintry morning the desolation of the place was more than usually apparent, and Mr. Jerningham, being on this particular occasion inclined to contemplate every object on the darker side, was strongly impressed by the dreariness of the long avenue, where the bare, black branches of the elms swayed to and fro against the winter sky, and where the withered leaves drifted before him with every gust of biting winter wind.

It was in the avenue that had been the grand approach to the mansion in the days when the great world visited Greenlands, that Mr. Jerningham came upon a young man, sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, reading. To see any one seated on so cold a morning was in itself a fact for remark; but this hardy young student had the air of a man who takes his ease on a sofa in his own snug study, so absorbed was his manner, so comfortable his attitude. Approaching nearer, the *blasé* wanderer in many lands perceived that the young student's face was flushed as if with recent exercise, and, while perceiving this, he could not fail to observe that the face was one of the handsomest, and at the same time the noblest, he had ever looked upon. As an artist, Harold Jerningham was impressed by the perfect outline of that grand fair face; as an observer of mankind, he was conscious that the stamp of high thoughts had been set upon the countenance, and that the light of a pure young soul shone out of the eyes that were slowly raised to look at him as he drew near the log on which the student reclined. He went near enough to see the title of the book the young man was reading. It was one of the Platonic Dialogues, in Greek.

"Ho, ho!" thought Mr. Jerningham; "I took my young gentleman for a gamekeeper, or the son of my bailiff; but even in this levelling age I doubt if gamekeepers or embryo bailiffs are so far advanced in Greek. I suppose he is a friend of De Bergerac's."

Having arrived at this conclusion, Mr. Jerningham proceeded

to accost the young dreamer, for whom that leafless avenue was peopled day by day with the images of all that was greatest and most beautiful in the golden age of this earth, and to whom the romantic desolation of Greenlands had become far dearer within the last four months than it had ever been to the lord of mansion and park, forest and upland.

"Do you not feel it rather cold for that kind of reading?" asked the proprietor of the avenue.

The frank young face was turned to him with a smile.

"Not at all; I have been walking for the last hour, and feel as warm as if it were midsummer."

He looked just a little wonderingly at Mr. Jerningham as he spoke. He knew all the visitors to the Grange, and assuredly this gentleman in a fur-lined overcoat was not one of them. Some stranger, perhaps, who had found the gate open, and had strayed into the park out of curiosity.

"You seem accustomed to this kind of open-air study," said the traveller, seating himself on one end of the fallen log, in order to get a better view of the student's face. It was only the listless curiosity of an idler that beguiled him into loitering thus. He had for the latter years of his life been at best only a loiterer upon the highways and byways of this world, and the interest which he felt in this young student of Plato was the same kind of interest he might have felt in a solitary little Savoyard with white mice, or some semi-idiotic old reaper, toiling under a southern sun; an interest by no means so warm as that which a picture or a statue inspired in this jaded wanderer.

"Yes," replied the young man; "I spend all my leisure mornings in the park, reading and thinking. I fancy one thinks better when one walks in such a place as this."

"If by 'one' you speak of *yourself*, I have no doubt you are right; but if your 'one' means mankind in general, I am sure you are wrong. My dreariest thoughts have come to me under these trees this morning."

The young man's face was quick to express sympathy, in a look that was half wonder, half pity.

"How quick a man's sympathies are at his age!" thought Harold Jerningham, "and how soon they wear out!"

And then, after a pause, he added, aloud, "You live somewhere near at hand, I suppose?"

"I live very near at hand; I live in the park."

"At the great house?" exclaimed Mr. Jerningham. "After all, my handsome young student will turn out to be the self educated son or nephew of my housekeeper," he thought, not without some slight sense of vexation; for he had been studying the young man's profile, and had given him credit for patrician blood on the strength of the delicate modelling of nose and chin.

"No; not at the great house. I live with M. de Bergerac, at the Grange."

"You live with De Bergerac! You are not his—no, he has no son."

"I have the honour to be his secretary."

"Indeed! and a Englishman! Has De Bergerac turned political agitator, or Orleanist conspirator, that he must needs have a secretary?"

"No; it is my privilege to assist M. de Bergerac in the preparation of a great literary work."

"I am pleased to hear you speak as if you valued that privilege, my young friend," said Mr. Jerningham, with more warmth than was usual to him.

"I do indeed prize it more highly than anything on earth," answered the young man; and as he said this, his face flushed crimson to the roots of his hair.

"Why the deuce does he blush like a girl when I say something commonly civil to him?" thought Mr. Jerningham.

"You speak as if you knew M. de Bergerac," said the student, presently.

"I do know him. He is the best friend I have in the world."

"Ah, then, I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Jerningham, the owner of this place?"

"You do enjoy that supreme bliss; I am Mr. Jerningham; and now, as you have guessed my name, perhaps you will tell me yours."

"My name is Eustace Thorburn."

"And why the deuce does he blush like a girl when he tells me his name?" thought Mr. Jerningham, taking note of a second crimson flush that came and went upon the brow and cheek of the student.

"And my good friend is well and happy?" he asked, presently.

"Very well, very cheerful. Shall I hurry back to the Grange, and tell him you have arrived, Mr. Jerningham? I have heard him speak of you so much, and I know what a pleasure it will be to him to hear of your coming."

"And it will be a pleasure to me to announce it with my own lips. You must not come between me and my pleasures, Mr.—Mr. Thorburn; they are very few."

"Believe me, I should be sorry to do so," replied Eustace, as the two men bowed and parted; Mr. Jerningham to walk on towards the house, Eustace to resume his lonely ramble.

"You would be sorry? Not you!" mused the owner of Greenlands, as he walked slowly along the pathway that was so thickly strewn with dead leaves. "What does youth care how it tramples on the hopes of the old? When I refused the young bride my father and mother had chosen for me, and the alliance

that had been the fairest dream they had woven for my future, what heed had I for the bitterness of their disappointment? The girl was pretty, and true, and innocent, the daughter of a nobler house than mine, and the beloved of my kindred; but she was not——. Well; she was not Ægeria; she was not the mystic nymph of an enchanted grot; she was only an amiable young lady whom I had known from childhood, and about whom some mischievous demon had whispered into my ear the hateful fact that she was intended for me. I met my Ægeria after; and what came of it? Ah, me! that our brightest dreams must end so coldly! Numa's nymph came to him only in the evening; and perhaps there are few men who could retain the fervour of their devotion for an Ægeria of all day long, and to-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that again. And then your mortal Ægeria has such a capacity for tears. A cold look, a hasty word, an accidental reference to the past, a hint of the uncertainty of the future—and the nymph is transformed into a waterfall. It is the fable of Hippocrene over again; but the fount is not so revivifying as that classic spring."

From thinking of his own past, Mr. Jerningham fell to musing upon Eustace Thorburn's future.

"He has that which all the lands of the Jerninghams could not buy for me, were I free to barter them," he said to himself, bitterly: "youth and hope, youth and hope! Will he waste both treasures as I wasted them, I wonder? I think not. He has a thoughtfulness and gravity of expression that promise well for his future. And how his face brightens when he smiles! Was I ever so handsome as that, I wonder, in the days when the world called me —dangerous? No, never! At its best, my face wanted the earnestness that is the highest charm of his. Why do I compare myself with him? Because I have ended life just as he is beginning it, I suppose. The Alpha and the Omega meet, and Omega is jealous of his fair young rival. How little the landscape has changed since I was like that youngster yonder, newly returned from Oxford, with my head crammed with the big talk of Greek orators and the teaching of Greek sophists, eager to exhaust the delights of the universe in the shortest period possible; eager to gather all the flowers of youth and manhood, so as to leave the great Sahara of middle age without a blossom! And the flowers have been gathered and have faded, and have been thrown away, and the great Sahara remains entirely barren. No, not entirely; there is at least one solitary leaflet—one poor little pale blossom—my friendship for De Bergerac."

Musing thus, the owner of Greenlands turned aside from that solemn avenue, at the end of which there frowned upon him the noble red-brick dwelling-house of England's Augustine era. He

had no desire to reënter that stately abode, where the plump goddesses and nymphs of Kneller disported themselves upon the domed ceilings, and where the twelve Cæsars in black marble scowled upon him from their niches in the circular entrance-hall. Solomon himself could have been no more weary of the vineyards he had planted—and vines of one's own planting are at best but poor creatures—than was Mr. Jerningham of Sir Godfrey's nymphs and the scowling Cæsars.

"And Cleopatra once tolerated one of *ces messieurs*," he had said to himself sometimes, as he looked round the grand, gloomy chamber. "Cleopatra, the *espiègle*, the despotic, the Semiramis of Egypt, the Mary Stuart of the Nile, the Ninon of the ancient world."

Between the great avenue and the Queen Anne mansion there stretched the stiff walks of an Italian garden, and across this Mr. Jerningham went to a gate, which opened into the woodiest part of the park. A narrow path across this woody region brought him to the boundary of M. de Bergerac's territory, protected by a six-foot holly-hedge, more formidable than any wall ever fashioned by mortal builder.

A gate cut in this hedge opened into the quaint old flower-garden, and through this gate Mr. Jerningham went to visit his friend, after having passed unknown and unnoticed beneath the shadow of the house in which he had been born.

"'Tis sweet to hear the watchdog's honest bark bay deep-mouthed welcome—as we draw near home,'" Mr. Jerningham said to himself; "but it is not quite so sweet when the watchdog rushes out of his kennel, possessed with an evident thirst for one's blood, as that old mastiff yonder rushed at me just now. Every traveller is not a Belisarius. Ah, here we are! there is the pretty old-fashioned lawn, with its flower-beds and evergreens, and there the low rambling cottage in which Jack Fermor, the bailiff, used to live when I was a boy. I remember going to him one summer morning to get my fishing-tackle mended, when I was a lad at Eton. Yes, this looks like a home! Dear old Theodore! I shall be content if he is only half as glad to see me as I shall be to see him."

The returning traveller found the door under the thatched porch unsecured by bolt or bar. In the heart of Greenlands Park no one ever thought of bolting a door. But the inmates of the Grange were not without their guardians. An enormous black dog sprang forth to meet the stranger as he approached the threshold, formidable as the dragon whose fiery eyes glared upon the luckless companions of Cadmus.

Happily for Mr. Jerningham, the faithful animal was under admirable control. After giving utterance to one low growl, that sounded a warning rather than a threat, he surveyed the

intruder with a critical eye, and sniffed at him with a suspicious sniff; and then, being satisfied that the master of Greenlands was not a member of the dangerous classes, he drew politely aside and permitted the visitor to enter.

The door of the drawing-room was wide open, and a cheerful fire burning in the low grate lighted the pleasant picture of a young lady seated at a table reading, with books and writing materials scattered about her.

It was nine years since Harold Jerningham had seen his friend, and it was rather difficult for him to realize the fact that this young lady could by any possibility be the same individual he remembered in the shape of a pretty, fair-haired child, roaming about the gardens with an ugly mongrel-puppy in her arms, and to whom he promised the finest dog that Newfoundland could produce.

He had remembered his promise, though he had forgotten the fair young damsel to whom the pledge was given. Hephæstus was the animal imported at the command of Mr. Jerningham. He had been brought to Greenlands a puppy, with big clumsy head and paws, and an all-pervading sleepiness of aspect, and he had flourished and waxed strong under the loving care of Helen, who was fondly attached to him.

The visitor's light footstep scarcely sounded on the carpeted floor, but a warning "yap" from Hephæstus proclaimed the advent of a stranger. Helen rose to receive her father's guest, and welcomed him with a smile and a blush.

"How these Berkshire people blush!" thought Mr. Jerningham; "it is the veritable Arcadia. The inhabitants of Ardennes were not more primitive. Indeed, Rosalind was the most *rusée* of coquettes compared to this young lady."

"What a delightful surprise, Mr. Jerningham!" said Helen, with a frank smile; "papa will be so pleased to see you."

"Then you remember me, Mademoiselle de Bergerac, after so long an interval—an interval that has changed you so much that I could scarcely believe my little playfellow of the garden had grown into this tall young lady?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; I remember you perfectly. The time has changed you very little. And I should have been most ungrateful if I had forgotten you after your kindness."

"My kindness ——?"

"In sending Hephæstus—the Newfoundland puppy, you know. Papa christened him Hephæstus on account of his blackness. He has grown such a noble, faithful creature, and we all love him so dearly."

"You all love him? Has your dog so many friends as that emphatic 'all' implies?" asked Mr. Jerningham, wonderingly.

"I mean myself and papa, and papa's secretary, Mr. Thorburn."

The girl stopped suddenly, and this time it was a very vivid blush which dyed her fair young face, for it seemed to her that the eyes of her father's friend were fixed upon her with a pitiless scrutiny.

"Oh, now," thought the master of Greenlands, "I begin to understand why that young man blushed when he spoke of the privilege involved in his position here."

He glanced at the open book which lay under Mademoiselle de Bergerac's hand, and was surprised to perceive that it was a duplicate of the volume he had seen in the hands of the student in the park.

"You read Greek, Mdlle. de Bergerac?"

"Yes, papa, taught me a little Greek ever so long ago. Will you not call me Helen, please? I should like it so much better."

"I shall be much honoured if you will permit me to do so. And you are reading Plato, I see. Is he not rather a difficult author for a young student in Greek?"

"Yes, he seems rather difficult, but I get a great deal of help, I am reading the Phædo with Mr. Thorburn, who is working very hard at the classics. I believe he means to try for his degree by-and-by, when he leaves papa. He has a German degree already, but he seems to think that worth very little. I think he is rather ambitious."

"He seems to be altogether a wonderful person, this Mr. Thorburn."

"Yes, he is very clever—at least, papa says so, and you know papa is very well able to form a judgment on that point. And papa likes him exceedingly."

"Indeed! and has he been long established here—domiciled with you, in his post of secretary?"

"He has been with us about four months."

"May I ask where your father picked him up—by whose recommendation he came here?"

"It was Mr. Desmond who introduced him to papa,—Mr. Desmond, the editor of the *Areopagus*."

"Ah! that Mr. Desmond has a knack of obliging one."

"Papa has considered himself very fortunate in finding any one able to take the warm interest which Mr. Thorburn takes in his book. It is rather dry work, you know, Mr. Jerningham, verifying quotations in half-a-dozen languages, and hunting out dates, and names, and all those petty details which used to absorb so much of papa's time when he was without a secretary. Do you know that Mr. Thorburn has often travelled to London and back in the same day, in order to consult some book or manuscript in the British Museum; and he has taught himself Sanscrit since he has been with us, in the hope of making himself still more useful to papa."

The young lady's face glowed with enthusiasm as she said this. To do service for her father was to win the highest claim upon her gratitude. Mr. Jerningham looked at her with a half-smile of amusement, which was not without some shade of bitterness.

"I have no doubt Mr. Thorburn is an inestimable treasure," he said, coldly. "I know a little humpbacked German who is a perfect prodigy of learning—a man who is master of all the dialects of India, and has the Râmâyana at his fingers' ends. I am sure he would have been very glad to perform Mr. Thorburn's duties for half the money my friend gives that ambitious young student; but my German is a perfect Quasimodo in the matter of ugliness, and your papa might object to that."

"I will run to tell papa that you have arrived," said Helen. "I know what real pleasure the news will give him."

She left the room, and Mr. Jerningham remained for some minutes standing by the table, with the volume of Platonic Dialogues open in his hand, in the very attitude in which she had left him, profoundly meditative of aspect.

"How lovely she is!" he said to himself. "Has this Berkshire air the property of making youth beautiful? That young Thorburn is a model for a Greek sculptor, and she—she is as lovely as Phrynè, when Praxiteles saw her returning from her sea-bath. And Mademoiselle and the secretary are in love with each other. I arrive, like the *seigneur du village* in a French operetta, just in time to assist in a little Arcadian romance. I wonder that De Bergerac should be so absurdly imprudent as to admit this man into his household. He is, no doubt, a nameless adventurer, with nothing but his good looks and some amount of education to recommend him. And he, perhaps, labours under the delusion that our dear recluse is rich. I will take the opportunity of talking to him to-morrow, and opening his eyes on that point. And I must take Theodore to task for his folly. He is as proud as Lucifer, after his own fashion, and would be the last of men to sanction the alliance of his only child with an English adventurer."

It seemed as if Mr. Jerningham took somewhat kindly to his part of *seigneur du village*, and was by no means inclined to the policy of non-intervention in the affairs of these two young people. It may be that, having so long been an actor in the great drama of human passion, he could not resign himself all at once to the passive share of the spectator, who applauds and delights in the youth and beauty, the joy and the hope in which he has no longer an active interest. He knew that it was time for him to fall back into the ranks, and see a new hero lead the great procession; but he could not retire with the perfect grace of a man who has played his part, and is content to know that

the part has been well played, and has come to a decent finish. The art of growing old is the one accomplishment which the *beau garçon* never acquires.

For his own part, Harold Jerningham believed that he had retired with a very decent grace from that field in which his victories had been so many. Prone though he was to anatomize the follies of himself and other men, he had not learned the mystery of that vague sentiment of bitterness and disappointment which had tinged his mind during the later years of his life.

He had taken existence lightly, and had taught himself to believe that the ills of life which press most heavily on other men had left him unscathed; but there were times in which the tide that carried him along so pleasantly seemed all at once to come to a dead stop. The rapid river was transformed into a dreary patch of stagnant water, black with foul weeds, and poisonous with fatal miasmas; and Mr. Jerningham was compelled to acknowledge that no man, of his own election, can resign his share in the sorrows of humanity.

He told himself very often that he had done with emotion, and that life henceforth must be for him an affair of sensation only; his peace of mind depended on the perfect adjustment of his *ménage* when he was at home, and on the tact of his courier when he travelled. But there were moments in which the subtle voice of his conscience whispered that this was only one more among the many delusions of his life. Thus, when circumstances transpired to prove that his young wife's heart had been given to another, even while her honour was yet unsullied, he had arranged an immediate separation, with the nonchalance of a man who settles the most trivial affair in the business of life, fancying that he should escape thereby all those slow agonies and bitter throes that are wont to rack the breasts of men who find themselves compelled to part from their wives. But in this, as in all other transactions of his existence, he had been the dupe of his own selfish philosophy. The sting of his wife's ingratitude was none the less keen because he thrust her from him with a careless hand. The sense of his own desolation was none the less intense because he had not suffered himself to love the woman to whom he had given his name. Even considered from a selfish man's point of view, his Horatian philosophy of indifference had been a failure. The fact that it had been so, and that he might have lived a better life for himself in living a little for other people, was just beginning to dawn upon him.

One pure pleasure he was to taste on this day—the pleasure that springs from real friendship. That one unselfish impulse which had prompted him to provide a pleasant home for an old friend, won him an ample return. Theodore de Bergerac's welcome touched him to the heart. It was so warm, so real, so

different from the polished flatteries he had been of late accustomed to receive, with a conventional smile upon his lips and the bitterness of unspeakable scorn in his heart. To this man, so courted, so flattered, it was a new thing to know himself honestly loved.

De Bergerac was delighted by his friend's return.

"I thought we were never to see you again, Jerningham," he said, after the first welcomes had been spoken, the first inquiries made; "and this little girl here, has been so anxious to behold her benefactor. I think she is more grateful to you for her big black dog than for the home that has sheltered her since her birth."

And hereupon Helen blushed, and looked shyly downward to her friend and worshipper, the Newfoundland. Mr. Jerningham began to think that those maidenly blushes which he had observed while talking to the young lady about her father's secretary were only the result of a certain youthful bashfulness, very charming in a pretty girl, rather than an indication of that tender secret which he had at first suspected.

Helen looked first at the dog and then at her father, just a little reproachfully.

"As if I could ever be sufficiently grateful for my home, papa!" she said; and then raising those innocent blue eyes to the visitor's face, she added, gently, "You can never imagine how papa and I love Greenlands, Mr. Jerningham, or how grateful we are to you for our beautiful home. I think it is the loveliest place in the whole world."

"And from such a traveller that opinion should stand for something," added her father, laughing at the girl's enthusiasm.

"I am almost inclined to agree with Miss De Bergerac—with Helen, since she has given me permission to call her Helen," said Harold, with some slight significance of tone; "I am inclined to think Greenlands the loveliest place in the world."

"And yet you so rarely come to it, Mr. Jerningham!" cried Helen.

"I did not know the power of its charm until to-day. A returning wanderer is very sensitive to such impressions, you see, Helen."

"Yes, I can fancy that. But you have been in very beautiful places. You wrote to papa from Switzerland last year. Ah, how I envied you then!"

"Indeed! you wish to see Switzerland?"

"Oh! yes. Switzerland and Italy are just the two countries that I do really languish to behold; the first for its beauty, the second for its associations."

"Your father must contrive to take you to both countries."

"I think he would do so, perhaps, if it were not for his book. I could not be so selfish as to take him away from that."

"But the book is near completion, is it not, De Bergerac?"

The student shook his head rather despondently.

"It is a subject that grows upon one," he said, doubtfully; "my material is all prepared, and the extent of it is something enormous. I find the work of classification very laborious. Indeed, there have been times when I should have well-nigh abandoned myself to despair, if it had not been for my young coadjutor."

"Ah! yes; your secretary, the young fellow I met in the park—something of a pedant and prig, is he not?"

"Not the least in the world. He is a born poet."

"Indeed!" cried Mr. Jerningham, with a sneer; "your pedant is a nuisance, and your prig is a bore; but of all the insufferable creatures in this world, your born poet is the worst."

"I don't think you will dislike Eustace Thorburn when you come to know him," answered De Bergerac; "and I shall be very glad if you can interest yourself in his career. He is highly gifted, and I believe quite friendless."

Mr. Jerningham looked at Helen, curious to see how she was affected by this conversation; but this time her face betrayed no emotion, and in the next minute she quickly left the room, "on hospitable thoughts intent," and eager to hold counsel with the powers of the household. Mr. Jerningham would, in all probability, dine at the cottage, and weighty questions, involving a choice of fish and poultry, for the time banished all other thoughts from the young lady's mind.

"Let me congratulate you upon being the father of that lovely girl," said Harold, when she was gone.

"Yes, I suppose she is very pretty. Like a Madonna, by Raphael, is she not? the *belle jardinière*, or the *Madone de la chaise*. And she is as good as she is beautiful. Yes, I thank God for having given me that dear child. Without her I should be only a bookish abstraction; with her I am a happy man."

"Unluckily for you, the day must come when she will make the happiness of some other man."

"Why unluckily? I do not suppose my daughter's husband will refuse me a corner by his fireside."

"That depends upon the kind of man he may be."

"She would scarcely choose the kind of man who would deny her father's right to take his place in her home; not as a dependant, but in the simple Continental fashion, as a member of the household, with a due share in all its responsibilities."

"You will, perhaps, arrange your daughter's marriage in the Continental fashion, and choose her husband for her when the fitting time comes?"

"By no means. I have scarcely ever contemplated the question. My dear child is all in all to me; and it is just possible

I may be a little jealous of the man who shall divide her heart with me. But I will not tamper with the ways of Providence in so solemn a question as her happiness. She shall marry the man of her choice, be he rich or poor, noble or simple."

"And if she should make a foolish choice?"

"She will not make a foolish choice. She is the child of my own teaching, and I will answer for her wisdom. She will be the dupe of no falsehood, the victim of no artifice. She will never mistake *clinquant* for gold."

"You are very bold, my dear De Bergerac. Certainly the young lady seems the first remove from an angel; and I suppose the angels see all things clearly. And now let us talk about your secretary. How did you pick him up?"

"He was recommended to me by Mr. Desmond, of the *Areopagus*. I think you know Mr. Desmond?" added the simple scholar, who lived remote from those regions in which the Platonic attachment of the lady and the editor was current gossip.

"Yes," said Mr. Jerningham, briefly, "I know him. And he recommended this young man—Thorburn? And now you must not be angry with me if I seem impertinent. Do you think it was quite wise to admit this protégé of Mr. Desmond's to such very intimate association with your household?"

"Why not?"

"I suppose you happened to forget that you have a daughter?"

Theodore de Bergerac flushed crimson to the temples.

"Do you imagine that this young man would repay my confidence by a clandestine courtship of my daughter, or that she would receive his addresses?" he cried, indignantly.

"My dear De Bergerac, far be it from me to imagine anything, I only wish to suggest that it is rather foolish to bring a handsome young man, with a taste for poetry and a love for learning, and a very lovely girl, more or less affected by the same tastes, into such intimate association, unless you wish them to fall in love with each other."

"Yes, I dare say you are right; I dare say I have acted foolishly," replied the student, thoughtfully. "But I really never looked at the affair in that light: and then I have such perfect confidence in Helen's purity of mind, and in the soundness of her judgment. I am so fully assured that no such thing as secresy could ever exist where she is concerned. And then, again, as for this young Thorburn, I have watched him closely, and I believe him to be all that is honourable and excellent."

"You have not watched him with the eyes of worldly experience."

"Perhaps not; but I fancy there is an inner light better than a worldly man's wisdom. I would pledge myself for that young man's honour and honesty."

"The fact that he is such a paragon will not prevent your daughter from falling in love with him."

"No; it is just possible that she might become attached to him. I know she likes and admires him; but I fancy she only does so on account of his usefulness to me. However, the danger is incurred. I cannot dismiss a faithful coadjutor hurriedly or abruptly; and I am really very much interested in Eustace Thorburn. I believe there is the fire of real genius in all he does; and to my mind real genius must secure ultimate success."

"Surely Chatterton's was genius?"

"Undoubtedly; and Chatterton must have succeeded if he had been patient; but genius without patience is the flame without the oil. I believe there is a bright career before Eustace Thorburn; and if I knew that my daughter and he loved each other, earnestly and truly, I would not be the man to stand between them and say, 'It shall not be.'"

"How much do you know of Mr. Thorburn's antecedents?"

"Not very much. I know that he was educated at a great public school in Belgium, and for the last few years was a tutor in the same school. His mother seems to have been a widow from an early period. She died a few weeks before he came to me. He speaks of her very rarely, but with extreme tenderness. Of his father he never speaks."

"He has no doubt excellent reasons for such reticence. In plain English, my dear De Bergerac, I take it that your young favourite is an adventurer."

"He is an adventurer who has earned his bread by the exercise of his intellect since he was seventeen years of age," answered De Bergerac. "I have seen his testimonials, signed by the powers of the Parthenée at Villebrumeuse, and I need no man's attestation of his honour and honesty. You are prejudiced against him, my dear Harold."

"I am prejudiced against all the world except you, Theodore," replied the master of Greenlands, with some touch of feeling.

There was a certain amount of truth in this sweeping assertion. This man, to whom fortune had been so liberal, had of late abandoned himself to a spirit of bitterness that involved all men and all things. But of all things hateful to this weary sybarite, the most hateful was the insolence of youth and hope, the glory of that morning sunshine which must shine on him no more. It may be that in his jaundiced eyes Eustace had seemed to wear his bright young manhood with a certain air of insolence, to blazon the freshness and sunlight of life's morning before the jaded traveller hastening down the westward-sloping hill that leads to the realms of night. However this was, Mr. Jerningham was evidently disposed to be captious and argumentative

on the subject of his friend's secretary. Theodore de Bergerac, perceiving this, contrived to change the drift of the conversation. He talked of his book; and Mr. Jerningham, who was faintly interested in all literary questions, expressed a really warm interest in this one labour. He talked of old acquaintances, old associations; and the smile of the wanderer brightened with unwonted animation.

It was four o'clock when dinner was announced. The two men had been talking so pleasantly, that it was only by the deepening of the afternoon shadows they knew the progress of time. The little dining-room was bright with the light of moderator-lamps on table and sideboard, when Mr. Jerningham and his host entered.

Helen stood waiting for them in the soft lamplight, with Eustace Thorburn by her side.

"Neither Mr. Thorburn nor I would come into the drawing-room to disturb your talk, papa," she said. "He has been giving me my Greek lesson by the fire in here, while Sarah laid the cloth. You should see how she stares when we come to the sonorous words. I am sure she thinks we are a little out of our minds. You are to sit opposite papa, if you please, Mr. Jerningham. I hope you won't dislike dining at this early hour. We generally dine at three; and a really late dinner would have frightened our cook."

"My dear Helen, I have eaten nothing to-day, and am as hungry as a hunter. If you are going to make excuses, it must be for not having given us our dinner at three. How pretty your table looks, with that old Indian bowl of cream-coloured china asters and scarlet geraniums!"

"They are from one of the greenhouses at the great house. The gardeners are very good to me, and allow me as many flowers as I like, when our own dear little garden is exhausted."

"They should be no gardeners of mine if they were otherwise than good to you.—How do you do, once more, Mr. Thorburn?" added the master of Greenlands, looking across the table at the secretary, who had quietly seated himself in his accustomed place. "I did not think we should dine together when I came upon you this morning in the park."

This was an extreme concession on the part of Mr. Jerningham. As the two men faced each other in the lamplight, Theodore de Bergerac looked at them with an expression of surprise.

"Did nothing strike you this morning, Jerningham, when you first saw Mr. Thorburn?" he asked, smiling.

"A great many things struck me. But what especial thing should have struck me, that you know of, my dear De Bergerac?"

"The likeness of your own youth. It really seems to me that there is something of a resemblance between you and Thorburn."

"I did not perceive it," said Mr. Jerningham, with a coolness of tone that was not flattering to the younger man.

"Nor did I," added the secretary, promptly.

This was a kind of preliminary passage-at-arms between the two men, who seemed foredoomed to be enemies in the great conflict of life.

"Well, I suppose every one sees these things with a different eye," said De Bergerac; "but really I fancy there is some likeness between you two."

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS ST. ALBANS BREAKS HER ENGAGEMENT.

Amid the many distractions of an editorial life, Mr. Desmond contrived to remember the promise made to his old tutor. He proved the warmth of his interest in Miss Alford's dramatic career by an immediate appeal to the genial manager of the Theatre Royal, Pall Mall, and received in reply Mr. Hartstone's assurance that the first vacancy in the young-lady department should be placed at Miss St. Albans' disposal.

"Bovisbrook has just sent me a charming little adaptation of *Côteletes sautées chez Vefour*," wrote Mr. Hartstone, in conclusion; and as I find there are six young ladies in the caste—*ces dames* of the Quartier Breda, I believe, in the original, but very cleverly transmogrified by Bovisbrook into school-girls from a Peckham academy, who go to dine with an old West-Indian uncle at Verey's—I think I could manage to find an engagement for Miss St. Albans as early as March, when my Christmas burlesque will have had its run."

"As early as March!" said Mr. Desmond, as he read this letter; "and what is to become of that poor stage-struck little girl between this and March? Well, I suppose she can go back to Market Deeping, and shine as Pauline and Juliet, until the *côtelettes sautées* piece is produced."

Having received a favourable reply from the lessee of the Pall Mall, Mr. Desmond's next duty was to communicate its contents to the expectant father and daughter. At first, he thought of enclosing Hartstone's friendly epistle, with a few lines from himself; but, on reflection, he decided against this plan of action.

"Lucy might form exaggerated expectations from Hartstone's letter," he said to himself. "I think I had better see her."

There were no parties in Mr. Desmond's world just now. Every one worthy of a fashionable editor's consideration was out of town, and the gentleman had his evenings to himself. It was over his solitary dinner-table that Mr. Desmond arrived at this conclusion; and it was to the Oxford Road Theatre that he bent his steps after dinner, knowing that he was most likely to find Lucy Alford there.

The play was *The Stranger*. He went into the dingy dress-circle for half an hour, and saw Mrs. Haller play her penitent scene with the Countess. Miss St. Albans looked very pretty as she grovelled at the feet of her kindly patroness, dressed in white muslin which was in the last stage of limpness, and with a penitential white-lace cap upon her girlish head. He waited patiently through the rest of the play, and went to the green-room after the last dismal scene, impressed with the conviction that Lucy Alford was one of the dearest and prettiest of girls, but not yet on the high-road to becoming a Siddons.

He found poor little Mrs. Haller alone in the green-room, with a book in her hand, and with a very plaintive expression of countenance. She brightened a little on recognizing the visitor; but while shaking hands with her, Mr. Desmond perceived that her eyes were red, as with much weeping.

"I did not think you felt the character so deeply," he said; "those real tears are a very good sign for a young actress."

Lucy shook her head, despondently.

"It isn't that," she said; "I-I-was c-c-crying bec-c-cause I am n-not to play J-J-J-Julia!"

Hereupon she fairly broke down and sobbed aloud, to the consternation of Mr. Desmond, who did not know how to console this poor weeping maiden. The sight of a woman's tears was always very painful to him; and for this young childlike creature he felt a pity that was especially tender.

"My dear little girl," he said, "pray don't cry. Tell me all about this business. Who is Julia?—what is Julia?—and why are you not to play Julia?"

"It's Julia in the 'Hunchback'—Sheridan Knowles's 'Hunchback,' you know," replied Miss St. Albans, conquering her emotion with a stupendous effort, and telling her story with a most piteous air. "I was looking forward so to playing that very part. I played Julia at Market Deeping, you know, and the *Deeping Advertiser* said the kindest things about me,—that I reminded him of Miss O'Neill—though I can't exactly imagine how the critic on the *Advertiser* could remember Miss O'Neill's acting, as he is not yet nineteen years of age. And I have such pretty dresses for Julia—a silver-gray silk, that was poor mamma's wedding-dress, and is not so *very* scanty, as I wear it looped up over a white muslin petticoat, in the King Charles style, you know. And just when I was so pleased at the idea that the piece was going to be done, Mr. de Mortemar came to me and told me, quite cruelly, that I am not to play Julia. And there is a young lady coming to play the part—at least, she is not very young—an amateur lady, who comes in a brougham with two horses, and whose dresses, they say, cost hundreds of pounds."

"An amateur lady! That is rather curious. And why does Mr. de Mortemar wish that she should play Julia?"

"Mr. Johnson says she will pay him a great deal of money for the privilege. The houses have been, oh, so bad, and Mr. de Mortemar is very angry to find he doesn't draw. He says there's a cabal against him."

"Indeed! And this amateur lady comes to his relief, with her dresses that cost hundreds of pounds! I should have thought that an amateur lady, who keeps her brougham and pair, would scarcely care to make her *début* at the Oxford Road Theatre. Have you seen this lady?"

"Yes. She has been to rehearsal; and she has been here in the evening to see the call for the next day. I dare say she will come this evening. She is very haughty, and takes no more notice of me than if I were the ground under her feet: and, oh, you should see the heels of her boots!"

"She must be a vulgar, presuming person, in spite of her boots and her brougham. But if I were you, I should not trouble myself at all about her or the character she is to play. It will only be one leaf stolen from your laurels."

He said this with a smile, in which there was some shade of sadness. There was something very sad to his eyes in the spectacle of this girlish struggler in the great battle of life, and in the thought of that frail foundation whereon her hopes rested.

"She never can be a great actress, with such poor opportunities as she can have," he said to himself; "and she will go on from year to year hoping against hope, patiently enduring the same drudgery, living down perpetual disappointments, until some day, when she is sixty years of age, she will break her heart all at once because some petty provincial manager refuses her the *rôle* of Juliet, after she has played it for forty years, like the actress in the old story. Poor little Lucy! She is not the kind of woman before whose indomitable courage all obstacles must succumb. She was made to be happy in a bright home."

"Hark!" cried the young lady of whom he was thinking, "there is Miss Ida Courtenay talking to Mr. de Mortemar."

"Miss Ida Courtenay?"

"Yes; the amateur lady who is to play Julia."

"Oh, indeed! her name is Ida Courtenay; and she comes to the theatre in her brougham, and wears unimaginable heels to her boots. I think a Cuvier of social science might describe the species of the lady from those particulars."

Lucy only stared on hearing this remark, which was not intended for her comprehension.

"At eleven!" cried a loud, coarse voice without; "quite impossible. I shall be engaged till one. You must call the 'Hunchback' at half-past one."

"It will be rather inconvenient," murmured the brilliant De Mortemar, in a respectful, nay, even obsequious tone of voice.

"Oh, bother your inconvenience! The piece must be rehearsed at half-past one, or not at all, as far as I am concerned. *I* don't want a rehearsal. It's for your people the rehearsal is wanted. I'm sure your Helen is such an abominable stick that I expect to be cut up in my scenes with her, if I don't take care."

"Oh!" cried Miss Alford, with a little gasp.

"Who is the lady that plays Helen so badly?" asked Mr. Desmond.

"It's—it's I who am to play Helen," exclaimed poor Lucy. "Isn't it shameful of her to say that? I was letter-perfect yesterday when we rehearsed—I was, indeed, Mr. Desmond. And Miss Courtenay read her part all through the piece. And now she says—oh, it's really too bad——"

A mighty rushing sound, as of a Niagara of moiré antique, heralded the approach of the lady in question, who bounced into the green-room, and swept past Mr. Desmond with the air of a Semiramis in high-heeled boots. She was a tall stalwart personage of about thirty-five years of age, and she was as handsome as rouge, pearl-powder, painted lips, painted nostrils, painted eyelids, painted eyebrows, and a liberal supply of false hair could make her. The share that nature had in her beauty was limited to a pair of fierce black eyes, which might have been sufficiently large and lustrous without the aid of Indian ink or belladonna; and the outline of a figure which the masculine critic usually denominates "fine." Mauve moiré antique, a white-lace burnous, and a bonnet from the Burlington Arcade, did the rest; and the general result was a very resplendent creature, of a type which has become too familiar to the eyes of English citizens and citizenesses in this latter half of the nineteenth century.

Towards this lady Mr. de Mortemar's manner exhibited a deference which was somewhat surprising, and not a little displeasing, to the editor of the *Areopagus*.

"Good evening, sir," said the provincial Roscius, on perceiving Laurence. "I am gratified to find you again a witness of our performance. You will have observed a wide difference of style between my Claude and my Stranger. Those two characters mark, if I may be permitted the expression, the opposite poles of my dramatic sphere. Claude, the lover, belongs to my torrid zone; Steinforth, the outraged husband, locked in the icy armour of his pride—snow-bound, as I may say, by the bitter drift of woe—is my polar region. I venture to hope that you were struck by the different phases of passion in my silent recognition of Mrs. Haller. My provincial critics have been good enough to assure me that the whole gamut of emotional feeling is run by me in that situation."

"I fear that I am scarcely qualified to form a judgment upon your acting, Mr. de Mortemar," the editor replied, very coldly; "I was not very attentive to the performance this evening. I came to the theatre only to see Miss Al—Miss St. Albans—whose father is one of my earliest friends. I am sorry to find that she has reason to consider herself somewhat ill-used by your stage-manager in the matter of a certain caste of the *Hunchback*."

The attention of Miss Ida Courtenay had, until this moment, been occupied by some official documents stuck against a little board upon the mantelpiece; but on hearing these words pronounced in a very audible manner by Mr. Desmond, she turned abruptly, and glared at that gentleman with all the ferocity of which her fine eyes were capable. She lived among people with whom this kind of glare generally proved effective, and she expected to subjugate Mr. Desmond as easily as it was her wont to subjugate the weak-minded individuals with whom she consorted.

She found, to her mortification, that in this case she had glared in vain. The editor of the *Areopagus* did not flinch before the angry glances of this Semiramis of Lodge Road, but calmly awaited Mr. de Mortemar's explanation.

"I am my own stage-manager," replied that gentleman, with offended majesty; "and I have yet to learn by what right Miss St. Albans considers herself ill-treated in this theatre. This is not the return which I expected from a young lady for whom my influence alone could have secured a hearing from a London audience."

"Pray do not let us have any high-flown talk of that kind, Mr. de Mortemar," said Laurence, with some slight impatience of tone. "I am quite sure that you would not have engaged Miss St. Albans if it had not suited you to do so. I believe you engaged her for what is technically called leading business—the whole of the leading business."

"There was no written engagement. I offered to engage Miss St. Albans, and she was only too glad to accept my offer. Until this time she has played the complete range of leading characters."

"Indeed! Then, as there is no formal engagement, and as you have found a lady who wishes to supersede Miss St. Albans, I suppose there can be no objection to this young lady's withdrawal from your company?"

Lucy looked terribly alarmed by this speech.

"I—I wouldn't inconvenience Mr. de Mortemar for the world," she faltered; but Laurence would not allow her to say more.

"You must let me act for you in this matter, Miss Alford," he said. "As I am your father's friend, and as I am rather

more experienced in theatrical matters than he is, I shall venture to take this affair into my own hands. You may consider yourself free to cast your pieces without reference to this young lady, Mr. de Mortemar; she will not again act in your theatre."

"But she must act in my theatre!" cried the infuriated tragedian. "Do you suppose that you are to come here interfering with my arrangements, and taking away my actresses in this manner? You ignore me in your paper, and then you come and insult me in my green-room. Really this is a little too bad!"

"I think some of your arrangements are a little too bad, Mr. de Mortemar. I will be answerable for any legal penalty you may be able to inflict upon Miss St. Albans, whose engagement I hold to be no engagement at all. For the rest, you have Miss Courtenay, who will, no doubt, be delighted to play a round of characters."

"Oh, indeed!" cried that lady, with ironical politeness; "you're monstrously wise about other people's business, upon my word, sir. But, though I've seen a good deal of cool impudence in my life, I never witnessed cooler impudence than I've seen in this room to-night. If you knew what you were talking about, you'd know that I play Julia in the *Hunchback*, and Constance in the *Love-Chase*, and play nothing else. My dresses for those two characters were made for me by Madame Carabine Nourrisson, of Paris, and I should be sorry to tell you what they cost."

"I should be very sorry to hear it. I am too much of a political economist not to regret that money should be spent in that way. However, as you like the cream of the drama so much, Miss Courtenay, would it not be as well to try a little of the skim-milk? If you really want to be an actress, you cannot do better than extend your experience by some of the drudgery that Miss St. Albans has so industriously gone through."

"If I want to be an actress!" cried the outraged lady. "And pray who may have told you that I want to be an actress?"

"If that is not your design, *que diable venez-vous faire dans cette galère?*"

"I don't understand Latin, and I don't want to," replied the fair Ida, with a venemous look at Mr. Desmond; "but I beg to tell you that I am a lady of independent means, and that I act for my own amusement, and the amusement of my friends."

"I have no doubt of the latter fact," murmured Laurence, politely.

"And I have no intention whatever of sinking to a poor, weak, trodden-down drudge, in limp white muslin, like some actresses I could mention."

"Indeed, Miss Courtenay! And are you aware that it is you, and ladies of your class, who bring discredit upon the profession which you condescend to take up for the amusement of your

idle evenings? It is this—amateur—element which contaminates the atmosphere of our theatres, and the manager who fosters it is an enemy to the interests he is bound to protect."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Courtenay, who was very weak in a conversational tussle, where neither fierce looks nor strong language were admissible. And then, finding herself powerless against her unknown assailant, she turned with Medea-like ferocity upon the injured and innocent Manager. "I'll tell you what it is, Mr. de Mortemar," she cried; "since you are so mean-spirited as to let me be insulted in this manner, I beg you to understand that I shall never enter your theatre again—no, Mr. de Mortemar, not if you were to go down on your knees to me. And you may find some one else to play Julia, and you may let your private boxes yourself, if you can, which I know you can't; and I have the honour to wish you good evening."

Hereupon Miss Courtenay swept out of the room. And thus it happened that at one fell swoop Mr. de Mortemar was deprived of both his heroines, much to his discomfiture; but not to his entire annihilation. The unconquerable force of conscious genius supported him in this extremity.

"I can send on my walking-lady and second-chambermaid for Julia and Helen," he said to himself. "After all, what does it matter how the women's parts are played? The feature of the play is Master Walter; and I don't suppose the audience would care what sticks I put in the other characters."

This is how he consoled himself in the seclusion of his dressing-room, whither he retired, after bestowing upon Mr. Desmond a scathing look, but no words of reproach. The editor of the *Areopagus* was a person whom an embryo Kean could hardly afford to offend.

Lucy Alford departed to change the penitential white muslin of Mrs. Haller for the well-worn merino dress and dark shawl and bonnet in which she came to the theatre. Before doing so, she told Mr. Desmond that it was her father's habit to wait for her every evening at the close of the performance in the immediate neighbourhood of the stage-door.

"Then I will go and wait there with him," said Mr. Desmond. "I must excuse myself to him for the liberty I have taken in breaking your engagement, and explain my motive for taking that liberty. I'm sure your father will approve my reasons for acting as I did."

"I'm sure of that," answered Lucy; and then she blushed, as she added, falteringly, "I scarcely think you would like to go to the place where papa waits for me; it is a kind of public-house, two doors from the theatre. The gentlemen of the company go there a good deal, and as papa finds it so very dull in the dress-circle when the play is over, he is obliged to go there."

"I am not at all afraid of going there in search of him. I shall not say good-night until I have seen you comfortably seated in your cab."

"You are very kind; but on fine nights we generally walk home. Papa likes the walk."

She blushed as she said this; and the blush smote the very heart of Laurence Desmond. It was not the first time that he had seen those fair young cheeks crimsoned by that shame of the sinless—the sense of poverty; and the thought of those trials and humiliations which this gentle, innocent, tender creature had to bear touched him deeply.

He thought of the women he met in his own world—women who would have uttered a shriek of horror at the idea of walking in the streets of London at any hour of the day, to say nothing of the night; and here was this poor child walking every night from one end of London to the other, after mental and physical fatigue which would have prostrated those other women for a week. He thought of the extravagance, the exaction, the egotism, which he had seen in the women he met in society; and he asked himself how many among the brightest and best of those he knew were as pure and true as this girl, for whom the present was so hard a slavery, the future so dark an enigma.

He left the theatre, and found that the establishment of which she had spoken as "a kind of public-house," was an actual public-house, and nothing else. He went in at that quieter and more aristocratic portal on which the mystic phrase "Jugs and Bottles" was inscribed; but even here he found a select circle engaged in the consumption of gin-and-bitters. He inquired for Mr. St. Albans—concluding that the gentleman would be best known by his daughter's professional alias—and the old man speedily emerged from a parlour where some noisy gentlemen were playing bagatelle.

The old tutor was not a little disconcerted on beholding Laurence Desmond, and faltered a feeble apology as the two men went out into the street together.

"I am obliged to wait somewhere, you see, Desmond," he said. "I can't stand Harry Bestow in the farces; and I can't hang about the green-room; Mortemar doesn't like it. So I take a glass of bitter ale in there. The Prince of Wales is a regular theatrical house, and one hears all sorts of news about the West-end theatres."

Mr. Desmond wondered that the bitter ale dispensed at the Prince of Wales should perfume the breath of the consumer with so powerful an odour of gin. He gave no expression to this wonder, however, but proceeded to relate what he had done in the green-room.

"Yes, very right, very right, Desmond," said Tristram Alford, rather despondently, when he had heard all. "My little Lucy ought not to act with such a woman as that; and she can go back to Market Deeping for the new year. The journey will be expensive—but——"

"You must let me arrange that little matter in my own way," Laurence said, kindly. "I can promise Miss Alford an engagement at the Pall Mall in March; and in the meantime you must let me be your banker."

"My dear friend, you are too generous—you are the soul of nobility. But how can I ever repay——"

"It is I who am under obligation to you. Can I forget that if you hadn't made me work up my Thucydides to the highest point of perfection, those stony-hearted examiners would have inevitably ploughed me? And now let us go to the stage-door. Lucy—Miss Alford—must be ready by this time."

The young lady was waiting for them in the shadow of the dingy portal. The night was bright and clear, and for some little distance Mr. Desmond walked by his old tutor's side, with Lucy's little hand on his arm. He wondered to find himself walking the obscure streets, through which Mr. Alford had mapped out a short-cut between the Oxford Road and Islington; he wondered still more to find Lucy's hand resting so lightly, and yet so confidingly, on his coat-sleeve; and, above all, he wondered that it should seem so pleasant to him to be quite out of his own world.

He walked about a mile, and then hailed a passing cab, and placed the young lady by her father's side. He had made one very painful discovery during the walk, and that was the fact that Tristram Alford had been drinking, and bore upon him the stamp of habitual drunkenness. This, then, was the cause of that gradual decadence which had attended the tutor's fortunes since the days at Henley. What a man to hold the fate of a daughter in his hand! What a helpless guardian for innocent girlhood! Mr. Desmond's heart ached as he thought of this.

"I may help them a little for the moment," he said to himself; "but if this man is what I believe him to be, there can be no such thing as permanent help for him or his daughter."

"I don't know how to thank you for your kindness to-night," Lucy said, as she shook hands with the editor.

"Indeed, you owe me no thanks. I only acted on the impulse of the moment. I was enraged by that woman's impertinence, and that man's sycophantic manner of treating her. Let me know if he makes any attempt to enforce your engagement. I don't think he will. When are you likely to go to Market Deeping?"

"On the thirtieth, I suppose. The theatre re-opens on New-Year's day. Shall we—will papa—see you again before we go, Mr. Desmond?"

"Well, no; I fear my time—or—yes, you can breakfast with me some morning, can't you, Alford? Say the morning after Christmas Day. Come to my chambers at nine, if that is not too early for you, and we can talk over Miss Alford's future."

Tristram Alford accepted this invitation with evident pleasure; but Laurence, whose hearing was very acute, heard the faintest sigh of disappointment escape the lips of Lucy, as he released her hand.

"Good-night," he said, cheerily; "and all success at Market Deeping! I shall hope to see you when you come back to town for your engagement at the Pall Mall."

And so they parted—Mr. Alford and his daughter to enjoy the novel luxury of a cab-ride; Laurence to walk all the way to the Temple in an unusually thoughtful mood.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. DESMOND TO THE RESCUE.

Laurence Desmond had received a whole packet of invitations to country-houses, where Christmas was to be kept with something of the traditional warmth and joviality, and with ample entertainment in the way of carpet-dances, and amateur concerts, and impromptu comedies in the style popular at that Italian theatre which was so dangerous a rival to the house of Molière. But to all such invitations Mr. Desmond had returned the same kind of answer. The laborious duties of the *Areopagus* kept him prisoner in town, and would so keep him throughout the winter.

This was what the editor told his friends, but the fact was that Mr. Desmond dared not indulge any natural yearnings for jovial hunting-breakfasts, or private theatricals, or country gatherings of pretty girls and hard-riding young men. He was bound to devote all Christmas leisure to the society of Mrs. Jerningham. The lady received her share of invitations from the chiefs of those very houses to which Mr. Desmond was bidden, but elected to refuse all.

"I do not care to be stared at and gossiped about, as if I were some kind of natural curiosity," she said, when she discussed the subject with her friend. "The men watch you with malicious grins whenever you are decently civil to me, and the women watch me with more intense malice whenever you talk to other women. There are times when we are compelled to walk upon red-hot ploughshares, and then, of course, *noblesse oblige*, we must tread the iron with a good grace. But I don't see why we should go out of our way to find the ploughshares."

"My dear Emily, you insist on looking at everything in this bitter spirit."

"I know the world in which I live."

"I think the world has been extremely gracious to you."

"Perhaps so; but the world has taken care to let me know that I am accepted on sufferance. Your position in literature, and Mr. Jerningham's fortune, sustain a platform for me, but it is a slippery platform at best. I am happier in my own house than anywhere else."

"But unhappily you are not happy in your own house."

"At any rate, I am less miserable."

Mr. Desmond shrugged his shoulders. He felt that his burden was growing heavier day by day, but he could not find it in hi heart to be hard upon this beautiful woman, whose worst error was to love him with a jealous, suspicious love that made her own torment and his.

And by and by, when the demon of discontent had been exorcised, Mrs. Jerningham grew animated and gracious, and put on her sweetest smiles for the man she loved.

"You will spend Christmas Day with me, Laurence, will you not?" she pleaded. "I suppose I shall be honoured by your society on that day *at least?*"

The little, piteous air with which she uttered the last words, was scarcely justified by circumstances; since Mr. Desmond spent always one day, and sometimes two days a week at the Hampton villa.

So all the invitations were refused, and Laurence ate his Christmas dinner at River Lawn, where he met a second-rate literary celebrity and his wife, and an elderly magnate of the War Office, who had been a bosom friend of Mrs. Jerningham's father. They were people whom he met very frequently at Hampton. He knew the literary gentleman's good stories by heart, and loathed them; he knew the bad stories of the War Office magnate, and loathed them with a still deeper aversion; indeed, there were different series of Castlereaghiana and Wellingtoniana, which inspired him with a wild desire to throw claret-jugs and other instruments of warfare at the head of the narrator. Mrs. Jerningham's circle grew narrower every day. The green-eyed monster held her in his fatal grip, and one by one she struck the best names from her visiting-list. She did not care to invite very pretty women or very charming women; for every word or look of Laurence Desmond's was a sufficient cause for doubt and terror in her diseased imagination. She was jealous even of very agreeable men, if they absorbed too much of the editor's attention. She condemned him to dulness, and yet upbraided him because he was not gay.

"I fear you have not enjoyed your evening, Laurence," she said, as he lingered for a few minutes' confidential talk before hurrying off to catch the last train for London.

"I have enjoyed my little snatches of talk with you." he

answered, mildly: "but I am getting rather tired of Stapleton, and your old friend's Wellington stories are almost too much for human endurance."

"How do you like Mrs. Stapleton?"

"I have told you at least a dozen times. She is neither particularly pretty nor particularly amusing. She gave me some very interesting details about her eldest boy's experiences in the way of whooping-cough, and the trouble she has with her cook. How is it I never see your friends the Westcombes? He is a very nice fellow, and Mrs. Westcombe a most delightful little woman."

"You think her pretty?"

"Amazingly pretty, in the soubrette style. You used to admire her so much."

"I think it was you who admired her so much," answered Mrs. Jerningham, with suppressed acrimony.

"I only echoed your sentiments. Have you quarrelled with her?"

"I am not in the habit of quarrelling with my acquaintance."

"No; but you have a knack of dropping them. Your house used to be the pleasantest in England."

"And it has ceased to be so because Mrs. Westcombe has ceased to visit me? If I cannot make my house pleasant to you myself, I will not ask you to come to it."

"Your house is always pleasant to me when I find you and Mrs. Colton alone; but even you cannot make dull people agreeable. If you invite people for my pleasure, you should choose those I like."

"Very well, Monsieur le Soudain; in future I will send you my visiting-list."

"You are always unjust, Emily. You cross-question me, and then object to my candour."

Although Mr. Desmond was accustomed to relate almost all the details of his existence for the amusement of Mrs. Jerningham, he had refrained from telling her his experiences at the Oxford Road Theatre, or his renewal of an old friendship with Tristram Alford. Experience was fast teaching him a reticence that was the next thing to hypocrisy. It would have been very pleasant to him to tell the lady of River Lawn the story of Lucy Alford's trials and aspirations; but he had an ever-present terror of awakening that slumbering monster, always lurking in the deeps of Emily Jerningham's mind. He knew that to speak of Lucy would bring upon him a sharp interrogation; and he shrunk from the idea of a possible scene which might arise out of the mention of that damsel's name.

He expected Mr. Alford to breakfast on the morning after that uncongenial evening at Hampton, and had taken care that a tempting meal should be prepared for the dweller on the heights

of Ball's Pond. He waited breakfast for more than an hour, and only gave his visitor up when his own engagements obliged him to drink his tea and eat his dry toast with business-like haste, while the kippered salmon and devilled kidneys remained neglected in their hot-water dishes on a stand by the fire.

"I suppose poor old Tristram has forgotten our engagement," he said to himself, as he began his morning's work; "I should like to have seen him, in order to have some talk with him about that poor little girl's prospects; and yet what good can I hope to achieve for her, if the father is a drunkard? Nothing else could have brought him so low: for he had an excellent position when I knew him twelve years ago. Even then Waldon and I suspected his attachment to the brandy-bottle. He was so fond of recommending brandy and cold water as the remedy for every disease common to mortality. And now it has come from brandy to gin—which indicates a decadence of a hundred per cent. in his social status. Poor girl! she is such a pretty, winning, childlike creature, and of that sympathetic nature which is so susceptible to all suffering."

Neither letter nor message of apology or explanation came from Mr. Alford during that day; but very late at night came a mysterious boy, with a damp and dirty-looking missive from the learned Tristram. Mr. Alford was one of those people whose letters usually arrive late at night; so Laurence was in nowise disconcerted when his man informed him that a boy had brought this damp epistle, and was waiting for an answer.

"Has the letter come from Islington by hand?" asked Laurence, surprised that the needy tutor should have preferred to employ the expensive luxury of a messenger to the cheap convenience of a postage-stamp.

The major-domo departed to question the boy, and returned to tell his master that the letter had not come from Islington, but from Whitecross Street.

That fatal name explained all. Mr. Desmond tore open the flabby envelope, and read the following epistle, in the penmanship whereof was ample evidence of the flurry and distraction of mind incident upon a first night in bondage.

"My dear Desmond,—The sword of Damocles has been long suspended above my unhappy head. This morning the hair snapped, and a writ issued by a butcher at Henley, who enjoyed my custom for many years, but whose later accounts I have been unable to discharge, has brought me to this place. The necessity for the step which I am about to take has long been obvious; but I have hoped against hope, and struggled on bravely, with the idea of making some kind of compromise with my old Henley creditors. I now feel that this desire is vain:

'Longa via est, nec tempora longa supersunt.'

"I am too old to accomplish the Sisyphean labour of paying debts which seem to spring from the very earth, like the armed antagonists of Cadmus. I have resolved, therefore, to endure that shame which worthier men than I have suffered. I must avail myself of the protection which the law affords to honest poverty; and with this view I have sent for a solicitor versed in this kind of practice, and have made arrangements for placing my petition on the file.

"I am told by one of my fellow-prisoners that the small amount of my debts will in all likelihood be a hindrance to my release. If my liabilities were of a colossal character, their extinction would be a mere affair of accountancy, and I might enjoy the mildness of a winter in the south of France while my lawyers arranged an agreeable settlement in Walbrook, and might return in the spring to make my bow before the commissioner, and to be complimented on the excellence of my book-keeping. But for the man who owes a few paltry hundreds are reserved the extreme rigours of the law; and I am advised to prepare myself for much harassing delay before I obtain my protection and can once more walk at liberty among my fellow-men.

"This, for myself, I could bear with stoical fortitude; but what is my child to do while I am detained in this wretched place? The old Queen's Bench gave a hospitable shelter to the prisoner, and afforded a comfortable home for his family; but here stern warders refuse me the privilege of my daughter's company, nor could I bring her even for an hour into a common ward where she would be, in all probability, the subject of rude remark or insolent observation. The poor child is yet in ignorance of my incarceration. I left her upon a pretence of business in the City, intending to inform her by letter of my whereabouts; but now the night has come, I have not courage to write that letter; and in my dilemma I venture to appeal to you, the only friend on whose goodness I can count.

"Will you, my dear Desmond, call at Paul's Terrace early to-morrow morning, and tell my poor Lucy the reason of my non-appearance? If you will, at the same time, generously advance her a small sum for the payment of the account owing to Mrs. Wilkins, the landlady, and for the expenses of Lucy's journey to Market Deeping—which she must now take alone—you will confer a boon upon one who to his last hour will cherish the memory of your goodness. The cessation of even Mr. de Mortemar's pitiful stipend has been felt by us.

"Pardon this long epistle from your distracted friend,

"T. A.

'*White X Street Prison, nine o clock.*"

"Alone, and her father in prison! Poor, ill-used girl!" exclaimed Laurence, as he finished this letter. He had been

thinking of her, with regret and compassion, more than once that day; but he had little known the utter misery of her position. She was quite alone, this girl, who was of an age to need all the protecting influences of home—alone in a shabby lodging; perhaps with vulgar, sordid people, who would use her harshly because of those unpaid bills alluded to so lightly by the captive of Whitecross Street.

"What a father!" mused Mr. Desmond. "He leaves his daughter in ignorance of his fate, to suffer the tortures of suspense all day, and at night writes to ask me, a single man of something less than five-and-thirty years of age, to befriend and protect the poor, helpless girl. I am the only friend he has; and he can trust me, he says. How does he know that he can trust me? and what guarantee has he for my honour? Only the fact that I read with him twelve years ago, and have lent him money since that time. And on the strength of this he asks me to befriend his daughter in her loneliness! If I were a scoundrel, he would have done the same. Indeed, how does he know that I am not a scoundrel? And this poor little girl must go through life with no better guardian; and the world is full of scoundrels."

Mr. Desmond looked at the dial on the low Belgian marble mantelpiece, were a lank and grim Mephistopheles, with peaked beard and pointed shoes, kept watch and ward over an ivy-mantled clock-tower. It was nearly eleven o'clock.

"I dare say she is sitting up, waiting for him, at this moment," Laurence said to himself. "Why should she be kept in suspense till to-morrow morning? It will be no more trouble to me to go up there to-night than to-morrow; and I can much better spare the time now. It would be actual cruelty to let that poor girl suffer twelve hours more of uncertainty and apprehension; for I dare say she loves this reprobate father of hers as fondly as it is the luck of such reprobates to be loved. He is the kind of father who ruins himself and his children with the most affectionate intentions, and would perish rather than speak an unkind word to the child whose prospects he is destroying."

Upon this Mr. Desmond threw down his book, and went in quest of his hat and overcoat.

The streets were clear at this time, and a hansom carried Laurence Desmond to Paul's Terrace in half an hour. He saw the feeble light burning in the parlour-window as he stepped from the cab, and before he could knock, the door was opened, and a tremulous voice cried, "Papa, papa! Oh, thank God you have come!"

It was Lucy. She recognized Laurence in the next moment, and recoiled from him, with a faint shriek of horror.

"Something has happened to papa!" she cried, and then began to tremble violently.

"My dear Lucy—my dear girl, your father is well—quite well," Laurence exclaimed, eager to relieve the terrified girl, whose chattering teeth revealed her agony of fear. He took her by the arm with gentle firmness, and led her into the parlour.

"It has been very wrong of your father to leave you ignorant of his whereabouts," he said; "but I am sure you will forgive him when you know the cause. He is quite well; but he is a prisoner in Whitecross Street, and is likely to remain there for a week or two. He had not courage to write to you the tidings of his troubles, and so sent me to tell you his misfortune."

"Poor, dear papa! Thank heaven he is well! You—you are not deceiving me, Mr. Desmond?" she said, suddenly, with the look of terror coming back to her pale, sad face; "my father is really well? The only trouble is the prison?"

"That is the only trouble."

"Then I can bear it very patiently," answered Lucy, with a plaintive resignation that seemed inexpressibly touching to Laurence. "We have long known that trouble of that kind was inevitable. Poor, dear papa! It is a very uncomfortable place, is it not? He was in a prison on the other side of the Thames once, when I was a little girl, and poor mamma and I used to go and see him; and it seemed quite a pleasant place, like a large hotel. But even the prisons are wretched now, papa says. I may go and see him, may I not?"

"Yes; I believe you can be allowed to see him. But it is not a nice place for you to visit."

"I do not mind that in the least, if I may only see him. Can I go very early to-morrow? Papa will want linen, and razors, and things. Oh, why did he not send a messenger for a portmanteau? It would have been so much more comfortable for him to have his things ready for the morning."

"And he would have spared you many hours of anxiety," said Mr. Desmond, touched by the unselfishness of the girl, who in this hour of trouble had not one thought for herself. He could not avoid making a comparison, as he reflected how Emily Jerningham, under the same circumstances, would have bewailed her own misery, and the horror and degradation of her position.

"She could suffer slow death at the stake, with a smile upon her splendid face, for pride's sake," that impertinent inward voice, which he was always trying to stifle, remarked, obtrusively; "but she has no idea of enduring patiently, as this girl endures, unconscious of her own suffering in her thoughtfulness for others. With Emily the virtues are different phases of egotism."

"Yes; I have been very wretched since two o'clock, when I expected papa to dinner," said Lucy; "but I feel almost happy now that I know he is well. Do you think the prison is a *very* uncomfortable place?"

"Well, I dare say it is rather a rough kind of lodging; but no doubt your father will contrive to make himself tolerably comfortable. It will not be for long, you know. He is almost sure to get his protection in a week or two."

"Whose protection did you say?" Lucy faltered, at a loss to understand this phrase.

"His own protection—an immunity from arrest—his liberty, in point of fact. It is only a technical term. But what will you do in the meantime? That is the question."

"I fear I shall have to leave town before poor papa gets his release. The Market Deeping theatre opens on New-Year's night; and I think I must go on the 28th at latest. They are going to do the burlesque of *Lucrezia Borgia*, and I am to play Gennaro."

"Gennaro?"

"Yes. The son, you know. I believe he gets poisoned, or something, at the end. I have to sing parodies on 'Sam Hall,' and the 'Cat's-meat Man;' and I have to dance a—a—cellar-flap breakdown, I believe they call it. It is a very good part."

"Indeed! The 'cellar-flap breakdown,' and 'Sam Hall,' and the 'Cat's-meat Man,' constitute a very good part. I am sorry for the legitimate drama."

"Oh, of course it is not like Pauline or Julia," cried Lucy; "but as a burlesque part it is very good. And in the country one has to play burlesque, and farce, and everything."

"And for that I suppose your salary is only four or five pounds a week?"

"My salary at Market Deeping will be twenty-five shillings," Lucy answered, blushing.

Four or five pounds!—it was a salary which she had thought of sometimes in her dreams. She knew that there were people in London who actually had such salaries; but to her the sum seemed fabulous as the golden treasure of Raleigh's unknown lands may have seemed to his mutinous crew.

Mr. Desmond made no remark upon the smallness of this pitiful stipend, though the thought of it smote his heart with actual pain.

"Your father sent you some money," he said, not without embarrassment, "to carry on the housekeeping, and so on."

"Papa sent me money! You have seen him, then?" Lucy asked, eagerly.

"No—a messenger brought me his letter."

"And the money. Where could papa get money? I know he had none when he left home this morning; and he has no

friend in the world but you. Ah, I understand, Mr. Desmond. It is your own money you are giving me; and you are so kind, so thoughtful, that you fear I should be pained by knowing how much we owe you. I am used to feel the weight of such obligations, and I have sometimes felt the burden very heavy; but with you it is different. Your kindness takes the sting out of the obligation; and—and it does not seem so deep a humiliation to accept your charity——"

Here the sweet, low voice trembled and broke down, and the tutor's daughter burst into tears.

"Lucy, my dear girl—my dearest Lucy—for God's sake don't do that," cried Laurence, overcome in a moment by the aspect of that half-averted face, which the girl vainly strove to cover with her hands. The water-drops trickled through those slender fingers. All day her heart had been well-nigh bursting with grief, and unhappily her fortitude must needs give way at this very inconvenient crisis.

Truly a pleasant situation for the editor of the *Areopagus*. Called upon, at a moment's notice, to play the part of comforter and benefactor to a pretty, sensitive girl of eighteen, whose father was in prison!

"If Emily Jerningham could see me now!" Mr. Desmond said to himself, involuntarily.

He had called Miss Alford his dear—nay, indeed, his dearest—Lucy; but it was in the same spirit of compassion that would have prompted him to address endearing epithets to the charwoman who cleaned his rooms, had he found that honest creature in bitter need of consolation. His conscience whispered no word of reproof to him on that score; but he felt somehow that his position was a perilous one, though he wondered what the peril could be.

"Am I a fool or a reprobate, that I cannot befriend an innocent girl without some kind of danger to her or myself?" the inward voice demanded, angrily.

Miss Alford had recovered her composure by this time.

"I have been so unhappy all day, that your kindness quite overcame me," she said, quietly. "I hope you will forgive me for being so silly."

"Do not talk of my kindness," answered the editor, who seemed now the more embarrassed of the two. "It is a great pleasure to me to serve—your father. You must go to Lincolnshire on the 28th, the day after to-morrow. Shall you be obliged to travel alone?

"Yes; but I am not at all afraid of travelling alone?

"Una was not afraid of the lion," Mr. Desmond murmured to himself, softly; and then he added, aloud, "If you really wish to see your father to-morrow, I will take you to him."

"You are too kind; but I cannot consent to give you so much trouble. I don't at all mind going to the prison alone."

"No, no; you shall not do that. There might be all kinds of difficulty about getting admitted, and so on. I shall call for you at twelve o'clock to-morrow. You must let me play the part of your elder brother upon this occasion, or your father. I am almost old enough to stand in the latter position, you know."

At this Lucy blushed crimson; and the sight of that shy, blushing face sent a strange thrill to the heart of the editor. He bade her a hasty good-night and went back to his cab. The interview had only lasted ten minutes—though the cabman mulcted him of sixpence by and by on account of the delay—and the grim-visaged landlady, who stood lurking at the head of the kitchen-stairs, had no ground for complaint that the proprieties had been outraged.

He stopped to say a word or two to this grim-visaged individual.

"Mr. Alford is unavoidably detained out of town for a few days," he said. "I hope you will take care of his daughter during his absence."

"I hope my little account will be paid before Miss St Halbings goes to Lincolnshire," answered the woman, sternly. "I've had a many theatricals from the 'Wells' in my parlours; though theatricals in general are parties I avides taking; but I never had any theatrical backward in his rent till Mr. St. Halbings came to me."

"Miss St. Albans can pay you to-night, if you please," replied the editor; "her father has sent her money for that purpose."

"Ho, indeed," cried the landlady, with a tone of satisfaction that was not without a shade of irony; "circumstances alters cases. I am glad to find that Miss St. Halbings has got so rich all of a suddent."

"She is rich enough to find new lodgings, if you make these disagreeable to her," answered Laurence, angrily. There was an insolence about the woman's tone which made his blood boil.

Yet what could he do? It would have been very pleasant to him to horsewhip this grim-visaged landlady; but one of the perplexities of social existence lies in the fact that the opposite sexes cannot horsewhip each other. Mr. Desmond ground his teeth, and departed with a sentiment of anger against a universe in which such a girl as Lucy Alford was subject to the insolence of grim-visaged landladies.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PERILOUS PROTEGEE.

Even the icy December blast, which buffeted Mr. Desmond, as his hansom descended the Islingtonian Mont Blanc, could not

blow away his sense of impotent indignation against the Nemesis who had presided over the youth of Miss Alford. His slumbers were rendered restless by the thought of her wrongs; and the picture of a desolate girl, travelling alone through a bleak wintry landscape, was the first image that presented itself to his mind when he awoke.

He disposed of his breakfast in about ten minutes, and from nine to half-past eleven worked at his desk as even he rarely worked. For scarcely any one but a helpless girl, whose sorrows had enlisted all his sympathy, would the editor of the *Areopagus* have sacrificed the noon of a business day. He glanced with a guilty look at a pile of proofs that lay unread amongst his chaos of papers, and then departed to keep his appointment with Lucy.

He took her to the prison, and was present during the interview between father and daughter. Lucy's tenderness and sweetness touched him to the heart. Never before had he seen such patience, such unselfish affection; never had he imagined so perfect a type of womanhood.

"And she will go to that country theatre, utterly friendless and alone, to sing the 'Cat's-meat Man,' and to dance a cellar-flap breakdown," Mr. Desmond said to himself, as he stood in the background, watching this Grecian Daughter of Ball's Pond, who would have given her heart's best blood for the captive father, upon whose neck she hung so fondly.

"I would rather see her under the wheels of Juggernaut than dancing a cellar-flap breakdown," thought Mr. Desmond. And at this moment there arose in Laurence Desmond's mind a desperate resolution. He would do something—he knew not what, but something—to prevent any further dancing of cellar-flap breakdowns on the part of Miss Alford. During that brief interview of the preceding night his quick eye had noted a mysterious rose-coloured satin garment of the tunic family lying on a table beside a shabby little workbox and a paper of spangles, whereby he opined that Miss Alford had been sewing spangles upon this rose-coloured garment, and that it was to be worn by her in the character of Gennaro, together with a pair of little rose-coloured silk boots, very much the worse for wear, but laboriously darned, and renovated by spangles.

"She might surely be a nursery-governess—a companion to some kind elderly lady; anything would be better than the 'Cat's-meat Man,'" he said to himself; and, being prone to act with promptitude and decision in all the affairs of life, he broke ground with Miss Alford immediately after leaving the prison. They had travelled from Islington in a cab; but as it was a fine clear day, and as Lucy seemed to consider walking no hardship, he offered her his arm, and began the homeward

journey on foot. He wanted to talk seriously to her, undistracted by the rattle of a cab.

"Are you very fond of acting?" he began.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Desmond; I love it dearly, when I play my own parts—Pauline and Julia—Juliet and Ophelia, you know."

"Yes; but there is so much hardship, so many discouragements."

"I do not mind either hardship or discouragement," the girl answered, bravely.

"Not now perhaps, while you are very young and very hopeful; but the day must come when——"

"Oh, don't, please don't!" cried Lucy, piteously. "You are talking like Mrs. M'Grudder. 'Wait till you've been in the profession as long as I have, my dear,' she says, 'and then you 'll know what it is to be an actress. Look at me, and see where I am, after five-and-twenty years' slavery; and *I* had talent, when *I* began;' and she lays such an insulting emphasis on the 'I,' and makes me feel utterly wretched for the rest of the evening, unless I get a little more applause than usual to give me courage. There is a chimney-sweep, a regular play-goer, at Market Deeping, who is said to be quite the king of the gallery—all the other gallery people form their opinion by his, you know; and I believe he likes me. He always gives me a reception."

"A reception?"

"Yes; he applauds me when I first come on;—that is a reception, you know; and a good reception puts one in spirits for the whole evening. The sweep cries 'Bravo,' or 'Brayvo' as *he* calls it, poor fellow; and then they all applaud."

Her face quite softened as she thought of the chimney-sweep, and Laurence Desmond watched her with a smile, half pitying, half amused—she seemed such a childish creature, in her ignorant hopefulness, and dependence on the approbation of chimney-sweeps.

"I should be very sorry to seem as disagreeable to you as Mrs. M'Grudder does," he said, presently; "but I am very deeply interested in your career—for auld lang syne, you know—and I want to discuss your prospects seriously. I do not think the stage, as it is at present constituted, offers a brilliant prospect for any woman. Of course there are exceptional circumstances, and there is exceptional talent; but, unhappily, exceptional talent dose not always win its reward unless favoured by exceptional circumstances. Your surroundings are against you, my dear Miss Alford. Your father's ignorance of the dramatic world, your own inexperience of any world except the world of books, must tell against you when you fight for precedence with people who have been born and bred at the side-scenes of a theatre. The prizes in the dramatic profession are very few, and

the blanks are the most worthless of all cyphers. And for the chance of winning one of these rare prizes you must stake so much. Even in these enlightened days, there are prejudiced people who hold in abhorrence the profession of Garrick and the Kembles, of Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Kean; and by and by, when you have failed, perhaps, to realize one of the bright hopes that sustain you now, and have entered upon some other career, malicious people will reproach you with your dramatic associations, and discredit the truth and purity of your nature, because you tried to support your father by the patient exercise of your talents and your industry. You see *I* know what the world is, Lucy, and know that it can be a very hard and bitter world: above all things, bitter for a woman whose youth is unguarded by any natural protector."

Miss Alford looked at him wonderingly. "I have papa," she said. "What other protector can I want?"

"Your papa loves you very fondly, I have no doubt; but his circumstances do not enable him to——"

"You mean that he is poor?" Lucy interposed, a little wounded.

"No, it is not of his poverty I am thinking, but of his inexperience. In all matters relating to the profession you have chosen, your father is as inexperienced as yourself. He cannot help you, as other girls who aspire to dramatic success are helped by those about them."

"Yes, that is quite true," answered the girl, rather sadly; "but I hope to succeed in spite of that. And by and by, when I get a London engagement, and have a salary of three or four pounds a week, papa and I can live in nice lodgings, and be very happy."

"And you really like your theatrical life, with all its difficulties; even with its Mrs. M'Grudders?"

"I like it so much, that neither Mrs. M'Grudder nor you can discourage me," answered Lucy. "I know that you speak very kindly, and that you are the best and most generous of friends; but I cannot tell you how it pains me to hear you run down the profession."

This was a difficulty which Mr. Desmond had never contemplated. In a moment of generous feeling, he had resolved to rescue this fair young flower from the foul atmosphere in which her freshness was fading, and, behold! the fair young flower rejoiced in that unwholesome atmosphere, and refused to be restored to loftier and purer regions. He would have snatched this brand from the burning, but the brand preferred to remain in Tophet. For the first time in his life, Mr. Desmond understood the nature of that midsummer madness which affects the ignorant aspirant for dramatic fame; for the first time he beheld what it was to be "stage-struck." If he had been talking to a

young actress, familiar from the cradle with the mysteries of her art, she would have heartily coincided with his abuse of "the profession;" but Lucy Alford was fresh from the little parlour at Henley, where she had rehearsed Shakspeare, Sheridan Knowles, and Bulwer Lytton, before the looking-glass, in a fever of poetic feeling, and she had all the amateur's fond, ignorant love of her art.

She knew that Mr. Desmond meant kindly by her, but she was cruelly affected by the tenor of his advice. "*Et tu, Brute,*" she said to herself, sadly. So many people had tortured and tormented her by their dismal croaking about the career she had chosen; and now he, even he, the friend who had promised to help her, went over to the enemy, and spoke to her in the accents of M'Grudder. She had been very happy that morning as they drove to Whitecross Street—yes, actually happy—though the father she loved was languishing in captivity; but her heart sank with a new despondency as she walked by Mr. Desmond's side after this serious conversation.

Was it all true that people had told her? she asked herself; was there no such thing as success possible for her, let her study never so diligently, and labour never so industriously? And then she thought of Mrs. Siddons, who appeared in London, young, beautiful, gifted, only to fail ignominiously, and then went quietly back to her provincial drudgery, and plodded on with inimitable patience, to return in due time and take the town by storm. It was from the consideration of this little history she was wont to obtain consolation when depressed by the advice of her acquaintance; but even this failed to console her to-day. Discouragement from Laurence Desmond seemed more depressing than from any one else. Was he not the kindest—nay, indeed, her only—friend, and could she doubt the sincerity of his counsel?

The tears gathered slowly in her downcast eyes as she walked silently by his side, thinking thus; but she contrived to brush those unbidden tears away, almost unseen by her companion. Almost, but not quite unseen. Laurence saw that she was depressed, and he had a faint suspicion that she had been crying; and immediately his heart smote him, and he was angry with himself for the recklessness with which his rude hand had smitten down her airy castle.

"Poor little girl!" he said to himself, very sadly; "and she really thinks that she will be a great actress some day, and win her reward for all the patient drudgery of the present. Well, she must keep her day-dream, since it is so dear. Mine shall not be the hand to let in the common light of reason on her dream-world. But I am very sorry for her, notwithstanding."

And hereupon Mr. Desmond tried to cheer his companion with much pleasant and hopeful talk; and the innocent young

face brightened, and the shy blue eyes glanced up at him with a grateful look which went straight to his heart, whither, indeed, all this girl's unsophisticated words and looks seemed to go.

"She is born to melt the hearts of men," he said to himself; "a tender, Wordsworthian creature—plaintive, and grateful, and confiding. She will make a very sweet Juliet, if she ever acquire dramatic tact and power; but I cannot endure the preliminary ordeal of the 'Cat's-meat Man.' Free trade in the drama is no doubt a supreme good, but there are times when one sighs for the days of the patent theatres, when every provincial manager kept a Shaksperian school, and would have shrunk appalled from the idea of street-boy dances and street-boy songs."

Mr. Desmond and the young actress walked all the way from Whitecross Street to Paul's Terrace, and it seemed to Laurence quite a natural occurrence to be walking with the girl's shabby little glove upon his arm. He was quite conscious that she was poorly dressed, that her shawl would have been despised by the tawdry factory-girls they met near the Old Street Road; but he knew that she looked like a lady, in spite of her well-worn shawl, and he had no sense of shame in the companionship. He had never felt a more unselfish regard than he felt for this girl; and during the visit to the prison he had decided upon taking a step, the desperation whereof he was by no means inclined to underrate. He had determined to obtain Emily Jerningham's friendship for Lucy Alford, if sympathy for any human creature could be awakened in that lady's heart and mind.

"I have never yet asked her a favour," he said to himself. "I will ask her to interest herself in this poor girl's fate. My friendship can serve Lucy Alford very little; but the friendship of a woman, an accomplished woman like Emily, who is in every way independent, may help to shape her future, and rescue her at once from 'cellar-flap breakdowns' and 'cat's-meat men.' Emily is always bewailing the emptiness of her life. It might be at once an amusement and a consolation to her to befriend this girl. I know it is a generous heart to which I shall make my appeal. The only question is, whether I can contrive to touch that heart with Lucy Alford's story."

Mr. Desmond only apprehended one difficulty in the matter, but that was rather a serious one. Might not Mrs. Jerningham—of late the victim of such morbid fancies, such frivolous suspicions—take it into her head to be jealous of this girl? and in that case there was an end to all hope for Lucy. Let the green-eyed monster show but the tip of his forked tail, and friendship between Mrs. Jerningham and Miss Alford would be an impossibility.

Reasoning upon the matter within himself, as he walked by Lucy's side, Laurence Desmond decided that jealousy in this case must needs be out of the question.

"No, no; she has been foolish and absurd enough in her fancies, Heaven knows; but here it is impossible. The girl is nearly twenty years younger than I am, and has nothing in common with me, or the world I live in."

After arguing with himself thus, Mr. Desmond decided that there was no possibility of any such feeling as jealousy upon Emily Jerningham's part; and yet it seemed to him that it would be a desperate and awful thing to address the lady of River Lawn on the subject of Lucy Alford.

They arrived at Paul's Terrace while the editor was still meditating upon the young lady's future, and, indeed, before he had altogether decided upon what was best to be done on her behalf. An unexpected difficulty had arisen, in the girl's enthusiastic regard for her profession. It was quite out of the question that Mr. Desmond should introduce Lucy to Mrs. Jerningham while the girl still hankered after the triumphs of Market Deeping. All thought of "cellar-flap breakdowns," and "cat's-meat men," must be put away before Lucy could approach the wife of Harold Jerninghan.

In this perplexity of mind, Mr. Desmond could not bring himself to bid Lucy Alford good-bye upon the threshold of No. 20, Paul's Terrace, as she evidently expected him to do. He lingered doubtfully for a minute or two, and then went into the parlour with her.

"I should like to have a few minutes' chat before I bid you good-bye," he said. "I suppose you really must go to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow is the latest. It seems very dreadful to leave papa in that horrible dingy place; but he says it will be only for a few days. I ought to have been at Market Deeping on Monday, for the rehearsals. Mr. Bungrave is very particular."

"What time do you start?"

"At a quarter-past five."

"In the afternoon, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, in the morning."

"At a quarter-past five on a December morning!" cried Laurence, with a shudder. "Isn't that a very inconvenient hour?"

"Yes, it is rather disagreeable to start before it is light, because cabmen are always so ill-tempered at that time in the morning. But the train goes at a quarter-past five, and I must contrive to be at the station at five."

"*The* train?" repeated Laurence. "There must be several trains for Lincolnshire in the course of the day."

"Oh, yes, there are other trains; but, you see, that is the parliamentary train, and in the profession, people generally travel

by the parliamentary train, because it is so much cheaper, you know, and it comes to the same thing in the end. One meets most respectable people, generally with large families of children and canary birds; and sometimes people even play cards, if one can get something flat—a tea-tray, or a picture—to play on. One has to hide the cards, of course, when the guard comes round, unless he happens to be a very good-natured guard, who pretends not to see them. Oh, I assure you, it is not at all disagreeable to travel by the parliamentary train."

"Well, I can fancy there *might* be a combination of circumstances under which a journey to—say the Land's End—in the slowest of parliamentaries would be delightful," said the editor, looking at the girl's innocent, animated face with a very tender smile. "But I think I could willingly forego the children and the canaries, and even the card-playing on a tea-tray. Suppose you go by the mid-day express, Lucy, upon this occasion, as the weather is cold, and you will be travelling alone? I will meet you at the station, and see to your ticket, and all that sort of thing; and then, when I have placed you in the care of the most indulgent guard who ever ignored card-playing on a tea-tray, I can go to Whitecross Street, and assure your father of your comfortable departure."

"You are too kind. I cannot accept so much kindness," murmured Lucy, to whom it was a very new thing to receive such evidence of disinterested friendship.

As she faltered her grateful acknowledgments, with a confusion of manner that was not without its charm, her eyes wandered to the chimney-piece, where there was a letter, directed in a sprawling, masculine hand.

"It is from the manager," she said, as she took the letter. "Perhaps to scold me for not being at the theatre last Monday. Will you excuse me if I read it, Mr. Desmond?"

"I would excuse you if you read all the epistles of Pliny," said Laurence; and in the next moment would have cut his tongue out.

Lucy tore open her letter with nervous haste. The change in her countenance as she read, told Mr. Desmond that the missive brought her no good tidings.

"Is there anything amiss?" he asked.

"Oh, it is cruel, it is shameful!" cried the girl, indignantly. "Mr. Bungrave has given Gennaro to another lady, because I was not there for the rehearsal yesterday. Papa wrote to him to say when we where coming; and if he had telegraphed to say I must positively be there, I should have gone. And now I have lost my engagement, after studying my part so carefully, and altering my dress, and——"

Here the young lady stopped abruptly, and Laurence saw

that it cost her no small effort to keep back her tears. She was very young, and the fever of the amateur, the devotee of a beloved art, was strong upon her. Laurence perceived also her regretful glance in the direction of a little old-fashioned sofa, on which there lay, neatly folded, the rose-coloured satin garment he had seen the night before; and he felt that to be disappointed of the glory of appearing in this costume was a grief to her.

"I must confess that I am not sorry for this, Lucy," he said, earnestly. "I do not think there could have been any lasting triumph won by the 'Cat's-meat Man.'"

Miss St. Albans could not be brought all at once to see that the "Cat's-meat Man" was an abomination.

"Gennaro is a beau-beau-tiful part," she said, struggling with her emotion; "it is full of good puns, and the parodies are splendid, and——. If I had a regular written engagement Mr. Bungrave couldn't treat me so: but there was only a verbal understanding between him and papa. I dare say it is all Mr. de Mortemar's doing, because of my leaving the Oxford Road Theatre. Mr. de Mortemar can do anything at Market Deeping: he is such an immense favourite."

"Indeed!" said Laurence, on whose editorial ear the "immense favourite" grated unpleasantly; "and it is my fault that you offended Mr. de Mortemar—my fault, my very great fault. But do you know, Lucy, that I cannot bring myself to be sufficiently sorry for what I have done. You see I feel a very real interest in your career; and I do not think your Market Deeping experience could be of any actual benefit to you. I admit that you must arrive at Drury Lane and Juliet by easy stages; but I cannot see why you should begin by dancing silly dances, and singing still more silly songs. In March Mr. Hartstone will give you an engagement at the Pall Mall; and in the meantime your father will get through his difficulties, and you will have leisure for the study of your beloved art."

"Yes," answered Lucy, consoled but not elated, "I shall study with all my might. Oh, Mr. Desmond, what would become of us if your kindness had not secured me a London engagement."

She was thinking sadly enough of the bitter shifts to which she and her father must needs be driven for want of the pittance that would have rewarded her labours at the little country theatre; and then at Market Deeping lodgings and provisions were very cheap, and in London everything was so dear. The kindness and generosity of Mr. Desmond seemed boundless; but there must be some limit to their acceptance of such help. They could not go on living upon this gentleman's charity.

Laurence saw her despondency, and had some idea of the cares

that troubled her. He could find no way of telling her that the dread spectre Poverty was a shadow she need fear no longer, since he was ready to place his purse at her disposal until—until when? Well, she would have a salary from the lessee of the Pall Mall in March; and then, of course, he need be Tristram Alford's banker no longer; and, in the meantime, what would his kindness cost him?—a ten-pound note now and then—a ten-pound note, which would be better bestowed thus than lost at a club-house whist-table, or squandered at a sale of books or bric-à-brac.

"You must try to make yourself happy while your father is under a cloud, Lucy," he said, cheerily. "Rely upon it he will weather the storm, and right himself speedily. I will answer for that. In the interim, it will be rather dreary for you in these lodgings, I dare say; and I should much like to introduce you to a lady, a friend of mine."

"I—I am sure you are very kind," faltered Lucy; "and I shall be pleased to know any lady whom you like. Is she a relation of yours, Mr. Desmond?"

"No, not a relation, but a friend of many years' standing. Her father and my father were very intimate; in fact, I have known her a long time. I think she was as young as you, Lucy, when I first knew her."

His thoughts went back to the little garden at Passy, the white wall and scarlet blossoms bright against the deep-blue sky, and Emily Jerningham in all the glory of her girlhood. Well, those days were gone, and, unhappily, the Emily and Laurence of those days had vanished with them.

"She is not young now, then, the lady?" Lucy asked, with an interest that was a little warmer than the occasion warranted.

"Well, she is not what you would call young. I believe she is nearly thirty; and that to a young lady of eighteen seems a venerable age, no doubt. She is a very agreeable woman, generous-minded, and refined"—Laurence felt a little twinge of conscience as he remembered certain occasions upon which the lady in question had not shown herself so very generous-minded—"and I am sure her friendship would be a source of happiness for you."

"It is very good of you to think of this. It will be a pleasure to me to know any friend of yours; but—but—I am so unused to society; and while poor papa is in that dreadful place, I think I would rather not see any stranger, please, Mr. Desmond."

"Very well, we will see about it. If Mrs. Jerningham should call upon you some morning, you will not refuse to see her?"

"Mrs. Jerningham!" repeated Lucy; "she is a married lady, then?"

"Yes, she is married. Her husband is rather an eccentric person—a great traveller; so she lives by herself, in a very charming house near Hampton Court."

"Indeed!" said Lucy, with a little sigh that sounded rather like a sigh of relief; and then she repeated her protestations of gratitude, which this time seemed less constrained.

After this, Mr. Desmond had nothing more to do than to say good-bye.

"I should recommend you not to go to Whitecross Street again," he said, at parting. "It is an unpleasant place for you to visit alone: and your father will soon get his release. If my time were less engaged, I should be happy to take you there again; but I am too busy for friendship. Good-bye. I dare say you will see Mrs. Jerningham before long. You can be as frank with her as you are with me; but I am sure there is no occasion to tell you that, for it is your nature to be truthful and confiding. Once more, good-bye."

He pressed the little hand kindly, and departed. He felt that he had conducted himself in an eminently paternal manner, and it seemed to him that the sentiment of paternal regard had a strange sweetness—a sweetness that was not all sweet.

CHAPTER XIX.

OUT OF THE WORLD.

The arrival of Harold Jerningham disturbed the even tenor of life at the bailiff's cottage, albeit he earnestly entreated there might be no change in his old friend's existence. Theodore de Bergerac's notion of hospitality was Arabian; and he would have slaughtered his daughter's favourite Newfoundland if Mr. Jerningham had hinted an eccentric desire for *pâté de foie de chien*. He altered his dinner-hour from three o'clock to seven, in accordance with the habits of his guest; and he took pains to order such refined and delicate repasts as might have been chosen by a Lucullus in reduced circumstances. His cook was and old Frenchwoman, who had lived with him ever since he had occupied a house of his own; and for a *vol-au-vent*, an omelette *aux fines herbes*, a cup of coffee, or a batch of pistolets, white as snow and light as thistledown, old Nanon was prepared to enter herself in a *concours* of the universe.

"Ne vous dérangez, donc pas, petite amour," she said to Helen, when that young lady expressed some misgiving on the subject of Mr. Jerningham's dinners; "nous avons toujours les vaches et les poulets; avec ça on a de quoi servir un dîner au lor maire. Et puis pour le café: n'est-ce pas que je l'ai fait pour madame la mère de monsieur dans le temps? C'était elle qui disait toujours, 'Il n'y a que Nanon qui fait le café comme ça;' et puis elle se meurt, la bonne dame, et puis il y avait la révolution, et monsieur me dit, 'Nanon, adieu, je m'en vais;' et puis j'ai tant pleuré, et puis——"

There was no end to Nanon's "et puis."

"C'est une espèce de puits qui n'a point de fond," said M. de Bergerac, when his daughter repeated to him some of the old woman's affectionate twaddlings.

It was some years since Mr. Jerningham had been to Greenlands, and in the past his visits had been of the briefest.

"Thou art always as one that falls from the heavens," said M. de Bergerac.

This time, however, it seemed as if the restless demon that ruled Harold Jerningham's existence was in some manner exorcised. The master of Greenlands took up his abode in those snug bachelor rooms on the ground-floor of the mansion, which he preferred to the statelier apartments above. There had crept upon the old house a silence and solemnity almost as profound as the mystic silence which reigned in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, and not even the coming of the master could break the awful spell. By night and by day the doors shut with a clang that might have sounded in the Castle of Udolpho. The catacombs of subterranean Rome are more cheerful than the great stone entrance-hall; the chamber in which Frederick Barbarossa sat in a charmed sleep, awaiting the summons that was to call him once again to the battle-field, was not more appalling than the great dining-room, where the shutters were seldom opened, and where the pictured images of departed Jerninghams looked ghostlike in the gloom.

It was only natural, therefore, that Mr. Jerningham should prefer the pleasant, home-like rooms in the bailiff's cottage. Considered as a habitation only, the cottage was much more pleasant than the great house; and at the cottage Mr. Jerningham enjoyed the society that was of all companionship most agreeable to him. With Theodore de Bergerac there was always some new subject for discussion; and the theme which employed the quiet days of the *savant* had a keen interest for his friend. The Frenchman might ride his hobby as hard as he pleased without inflicting weariness upon Mr. Jerningham, who in general society affected the tone and manner of a gentlemanly martyr.

He spent all his evenings at the cottage, after contriving to occupy himself somehow or other during the day; for this most selfish of men was too well bred to intrude upon his friend's studious hours. It was only between six and seven o'clock that Mr. Jerningham made his appearance in the little drawing-room, where he generally found Helen alone with her books and work, with the ponderous limbs of the Newfoundland stretched luxuriously upon the hearth at her feet.

The half-hour before dinner was by no means disagreeable to the master of Greenlands, nor was it unpleasant to Helen.

Jerningham the irresistible had not lost the charm of manner that had won him renown in that modern Hôtel de Rambouillet, at whose saloons all that was brightest in the regions of intellect lent its light; and across whose floors, silent and inscrutable as a shadow, passed that exiled prince whose voice now rules the Western world. Mr. Jerningham had acquired the art of conversation amongst the best men of his day, and he talked well. Subdued in all things, he pleased without effort, and was instructive without taint of dogmatism. He discussed a subject with interest, but he never argued. That war of words which some people call conversation was detestable to him.

Helen was unversed in the hateful art of argument, and she was the most delightful, the most sympathetic of listeners. She had read just enough to make her a good listener. There were few subjects you could touch of which she did not know something, and about which she did not languish to know more. She was not unpleasantly demonstrative of her interest in your discourse, nor did she cut you down in the middle of a sentence from the desire to prove herself your equal in wisdom; but every now and then, by some apposite remark or well-timed question, she demonstrated her interest to your discourse, her perfect appreciation of your meaning.

"If my wife had been like this girl, my marriage would have been a turning-point in my life," Harold Jerningham said to himself, very sadly, after one of these pleasant half-hours before dinner.

After that first interview between the two men, no more was said about Eustace Thorburn. To the secretary, Mr. Jerningham was unalterably polite, preserving always that tone of the grand seigneur which marks difference of rank, and yet is not the assumption of superiority; a manner that seems to say, "We are born of different races, and, unhappily, no condescension on my part can bring us any nearer to each other." It was the manner of Louis the Great to Molière or Racine. But a very close observer might have discovered that the master of Greenlands liked neither the secretary's presence nor the secretary himself. He talked to him a little now and then; for he was at his worst a gentleman, and could not insult a dependant; and he listened courteously to the young man's talk. But he rarely pursued any subject that seemed a favourite with Mr. Thorburn; and on rare occasions, when Eustace warmed with the excitement of some argument between himself and his employer, and talked with unusual warmth, Mr. Jerningham betrayed some slight weariness.

"Do you not find that young man insufferable with his rhapsodies about Homer and Æschylus?" he said to Helen one evening. But the young lady declared her sympathies with Mr. Thorburn, and this time without blushes or confusion whatsoever.

There is a calm, sweet peace that attends the monotony of

a happy life, in which doubt and bewilderment of mind are unknown. On that first day of Mr. Jerningham's return, Helen had been just a little embarrassed in her conversation with the unexpected guest; hence the blushes and confusion that had accompanied her mention of Eustace Thorburn. But now she had no more restraint in talking of the secretary with Mr. Jerningham than when she talked of him with her father. Harold saw this, and began to fancy that he had been mistaken. There might be no love-affair between these young people after all. He was very willing to think it was so. "I should be sorry to see Helen de Bergerac waste her regard upon that pedantic young prig," he said to himself.

Now most assuredly Eustace Thorburn was neither prig nor pedant; but in his own tranquil manner Mr. Jerningham was a good hater, and he had taken it into his head to hate this young man. The prejudice was, perhaps, not entirely unnatural, since Eustace was, in some manner a protégé of Laureuce Desmond's.

Happily for the secretary, this unprovoked dislike was yet unknown to him. He was no sycophant to languish for a rich man's friendship; and he had never studied Mr. Jerningham's looks or tones so closely as to discover the state of that gentleman's feelings. There was, indeed, no room in his mind for any consideration of Mr. Jerningham's thoughts or feelings. He was a poet, and he was in love, and he was happy; happy in spite of the lurking consciousness that there might come a sudden end to his happiness.

Yes, he was happy—calmly, completely happy; and it is just possible that this very fact was irritating to Mr. Jerningham, who was a creature of whims and fancies, capricious and exacting as a woman. Had he not lived a womanish, self-indulgent life, eminently calculated to render the best and bravest of men something less than manly? Mr. Jerningham had chosen his position in life, and had never outstepped it. In the great opera of existence he had played only one part, and that was the *rôle* of the lover—the false, the fickle, the devoted, the disdainful, the jealous, the exacting—what you will—but always the same part in the same familiar drama; and now that he was too old for the character, he felt that he had no further use in life, and that for him the universe must henceforward be a blank.

He felt this always, but never with a pang so keen as that which smote him when Eustace Thorburn's freshness and enthusiasm marked the depth of his own gentlemanly hopelessness. For the last fifteen years of his life he had kept himself carefully aloof from young men, holding the youth of his generation as an inferior species, something lower than his dog, infinitely worse than his horse. He saw young men from afar off at his club, and on those rare occasions when he condescended to appear in

society, and it seemed to him that they were all alike, and all equally inane. The only clever young men he had ever met were older in feeling than himself, and more wicked, with the wickedness of the Orleans regency as distinguished from the wickedness of the Augustan age, it followed—the decadence from a Lauzun to a Riom, from the stately saloons of Versailles to the *luxe effréné* of the Palais Royal.

But, behold, here was a young man who was intellectual and not cynical, learned and not a scoffer, ambitious without conceit, enthusiastic without pretence. Here was a young man whom Harold Jerningham admired in spite of himself, and whose virtues and graces inspired in his breast a feeling that was terribly like envy.

"Is it his happiness or his youth that I envy him?" Mr. Jerningham asked himself, when he tried to solve the mystery of his own sentiments with regard to this matter. "His youth surely; for the other word is only a synonym for youth. Yes, if I am angry with his obtrusive brightness and hopefulness, I suppose it is because I see him in full possession of that universal heritage which I have wasted. He is young, and life is all before him. How will he spend his ten talents, I wonder? Will he turn them into small change, and squander them in fashionable drawing-rooms, as I squandered mine? or will he invest them in some grand undertaking, where they will carry interest till the end of time? Helen tells me he is to be a poet. I have seen his lighted window shining between the bare black branches when I have been restless, and prowled in the park after midnight. Ah, what delight to be three-and-twenty, with a spotless name, a clear conscience, a good digestion, and to be able to sit up late on a winter's night to scribble verses! I dare say his fire goes out sometimes, and he writes on, supremely unconscious of the cold, and fancying himself Homer. Happy youth!"

A perfectly idle man is naturally the subject of strange whims and caprices; for that saying of Dr. Watts, about the work that Satan supplies to the idle, is as true as if it had been composed by Plato or Seneca. It must surely have been from very *désœuvrement* that Mr. Jerningham wasted so much of his life at the cottage, and devoted so much of his leisure to the study of Eustace Thorburn as a member of the human family, and Eustace Thorburn in his relation to the student's daughter. Certain it is that he bestowed as much of his attention upon the affairs of these young people as he could well have done had he been the appointed guardian of Helen de Bergerac's peace. Closely as he studied these young persons, he could not arrive at any definite conclusion about them. Helen's bright, changeful face told so many different stories; and the countenance of the secretary was almost as bright and changeful.

Sweet though the charms of friendship must always be to the jaded spirit, Mr. Jerningham was not altogether happy in his intercourse with the family at the bailiff's cottage. He found pleasure there, and he dallied with the brief glimpses of happiness, loth to lose the brightness of those transient rays; but he found pain far keener than the pleasure, and every day when he went to his old friend's house he told himself this visit should be the last.

But when the next day came, the outlook over life's desert seemed more than ever dark and dreary; so he lingered a little longer by the cool waters of the green oasis.

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. JERNINGHAM IS PHILANTHROPIC.

Mr. Desmond took the earliest opportunity of carrying out his resolution in the matter of Lucy Alford, otherwise Miss St. Albans. He dined at the Hampton villa within a few days of his visit to Whitecross Street, and entertained Mrs. Jerningham with the story of his tutor's daughter, her hopes and her struggles. He told the simple little story very pleasantly, and not without a touch of pathos, as he sat by the pretty fireplace in the Hampton drawing-room, after a New Year's dinner *à trois* with Mrs. Colton and her niece. The dinner had been a success, the snug circular table crowned with a monster pine of Emily's own growing; and the châtelaine herself was in a peculiarly amiable mood.

The most delightful of dragons had a habit of dozing after dinner, which was just a little hazardous for the fruit under her guardianship.

She always awoke from her slumbers to declare that she had heard every word of the conversation, and had enjoyed it amazingly; but this declaration was taken with certain qualifications. seated in her comfortable nook by the low Belgian mantelpiece, half in the shadow of the projecting marble, half in the red light of the fire, she was at once the image of repose and propriety—a statue of Comfort, draped in that neutral-tinted silk which is the privilege of middle age.

"Why do you ever ask stupid people to meet me, Emily?" asked Laurence, when he had finished Lucy Alford's story. "See how happy we are alone together. It is so nice to be able to talk to you *sans gêne*, with the sense that one is really holding converse with one's best and truest friend."

Mrs. Jerningham's flexible lips were slightly contracted as Laurence said this. His tone was just a little *too* friendly to be pleasing to her.

"You are very good," she said. rather coldly, "and I am

delighted to find you think my house pleasant this evening. Is your Miss Alford pretty?"

"No, 'my Miss Alford' is not particularly pretty," replied the editor, conscious that the green-eyed monster was not entirely banished from that comfortable paradise; "at least, I suppose not. She is the sort of girl who is usually called interesting. I remember a young man who called all the beauties of the season 'pleasing.' His vocabulary contained no warmer epithet. They were all pleasing. I think, without going too far, I may venture to call Miss Alford pleasing."

"She is young, of course?"

"A mere child."

"Indeed! a mere child, like Goëthe's Mignon or Hugo's Esmeralda, I suppose?"

This was a very palpable pat from the paw of the green-eyed one; but Mr. Desmond had set his foot upon the ploughshare, and he was not inclined to withdraw from the ordeal, because the iron proved a little hotter than he had expected to find it.

"She is not in the least like Mignon. She is a very sensible, reasonable young lady, about eighteen years of age. Now, I know that you are dreadfully at a loss for some object upon which to bestow your sympathy, and it has struck me that, with very little trouble to yourself, you might confer much kindness on this friendless girl. She is of gentle blood, of refined rearing; and she is quite alone in the world; for I count her broken-down, drunken father as less than nothing. She is all innocence, gratitude, and affection; and——"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Jerningham. "You appear to have studied her character with considerable attention."

"She is as simple as a child, and reveals her character in half a dozen sentences. Go and see her, Emily; and if you are not pleased and interested, let your first visit be your last."

"And if I should be pleased and interested, what then?"

"Your own heart will answer that question. The girl is a lady, exposed to all the miseries of genteel poverty, disappointed of one theatrical engagement, and not likely to be professionally employed for some months. I think your first impulse will be to bring her home with you. Her youth is fast fading in her miserable home, where there is so much anxiety, so little happiness. You have lamented the emptiness of your life, your inability to be of use to your fellow-creatures——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Desmond, I told you very plainly that I have no taste for philanthropy."

"And I took the liberty to disbelieve you. I am sure you do yourself injustice when you pretend not to be kind and womanly."

"And am I to go about the world adopting casual orphans, or any amiable young persons who happen to be afflicted with

disreputable fathers, in order to gratify the charitable instincts of Mr. Desmond, whose last mania is the rescue of pretty actresses from the anxieties and discomforts of their profession?"

"You will do just as you please, Emily," Laurence answered, very coldly. "I thought the history of this girl's trials would have interested you. I might have known that you would receive it in your usual spirit."

"And pray what is my usual spirit?"

"A very unpleasant one!"

"Indeed! I am a most objectionable person because I do not rush to the rescue of Miss Lucy Alford, whom you talk of, by the way, as Lucy, *tout court*. Shall I order the brougham, and go in search of your paragon to-night?"

Mrs. Jerningham extended her hand, and made as if she would ring the bell. Mrs. Colton's slumbers were broken by a faint moaning sound, as of remonstrance.

"I shall never again mention the name of my paragon, Mrs. Jerningham," said Laurence, rising and planting himself with his back to the fireplace; "nor will I ever again ask the smallest favour at your hands. You have a positive genius for aggravation!"

"Thank you very much. It is not given to every one to be so charming as Miss Alford."

"Good night, Mrs. Colton," said Laurence, as the image of the proprieties awoke to life, conscious that the atmosphere had changed since she sank to her peaceful slumbers. "I have a little work to do to-night, and must get back to town early."

This awful threat brought Mrs. Jerningham's proud spirit to the dust immediately.

"Oh, no, you are not going away!" she exclaimed. "Aunt Fanny is just going to give us some tea—why are those people always so long bringing the tea?—and after tea you shall have as much music as you like, or none, if you like that better. I will go and see your tutor's daughter to-morrow morning, Laurence; and if Aunt Fanny and I find her a nice person—nice in the feminine sense of the adjective, *bien entendu*—we will bring her down to stay with us for a few weeks."

After this, there was perfect harmony for the rest of the evening. No one could be more gentle, more humble, more charming than Mrs. Jerningham, after she had goaded the man she loved to the verge of madness; but so to goad him was a delight that she could not forego.

Early in the next afternoon the simple inhabitants of Paul's Terrace were eletrified by the apparition of a brougham and pair—a brougham, on the box whereof sat two servants, clad in subdued and unexceptional livery—a brougham which even the untutored denizens of Ball's Pond recognized as the very archetype of equipages. A tremendous knock at the door of No. 20

set Lucy's heart beating; a pompous voice asked if Miss Alford was at home; and in the next minute the door of the brougham was opened, and two ladies alighted—ladies whose furs were alone worth a fortune, as the proprietress of No. 20 informed her gossips at the first opportunity.

Lucy's heart fluttered like some frightened bird, as Mrs. Jerningham advanced to greet her, with outstretched hand and pleasant smile. It was long since she had been accustomed to any but the free-and-easy society of the green-room, where the ladies called her "St. Albans," and the gentlemen "my dear," in no impertinent spirit, but with a fatherly familiarity which had, at first, rather amazed her.

Mrs. Jerningham's carriage, and sables, and elegance, and beauty, were alike startling to her; and this handsome lady was Mr. Desmond's friend! The world in which he lived was inhabited by such people! Oh, what a vulgar, miserable place Paul's Terrace must have seemed to him! what a loathsome den the prison in which her father languished, broken-down and desolate! The ex-coach was drinking brandy-and-water, and maundering about great "wines," and patrician bear-fights—the battles of Ursa Major—in the prison-ward, as the girl thought of him, and was enjoying life very tolerably after his old fashion.

"Our common friend Mr. Desmond has sent me to call upon you, Miss Alford," said the lady in sables, with much cordiality of tone and manner, and with Lucy's timid hand in her own. "We are to be excellent friends, he tells me; and he has given me such an interesting account of your professional career, and your love for the drama, that I feel already as if I knew you quite intimately. I hope I do not seem altogether a stranger to you."

"Oh, no, indeed," faltered Lucy. "Mr. Desmond told me how kind you are; and I am sure——"

This was all that Miss Alford was capable of saying just yet. Mrs. Jerningham had noted every detail of her appearance by this time, with some touch of that fatal spirit whose influence embittered so much of her life.

"Yes, she is interesting," thought the visitor, "and not exactly pretty; and yet I am not quite convinced of that. Her eyes are large and blue, and have a tender, earnest look, that is assumed, no doubt, like the rest of her stage-tricks; and, I declare, the minx has long black eyelashes. I wonder whether she has dyed them? That rosy little mouth is painted, no doubt, in order to set off her pale complexion, which of course is pearl-powder, so artfully put on that one cannot see it. No doubt these actresses have a hundred secrets of the Rachel kind."

Thus whispered jealousy; and then spoke the milder voice of womanly compassion.

"That brown merino dress is dreadfully shabby, almost threadbare about the sleeves; and what a horrible place to live in, with children playing on the door-step, and fowls—actually fowls!—in the area. Poor little thing! she really seems like a lady—shy and gentle, and alarmed by our grandeur."

The voice of compassion drowned the green-eyed one's insidious whisper, and in a very few minutes Mrs. Jerningham had contrived to set Lucy at her ease. She made Miss Alford talk of herself, and her hopes and disappointments, in discoursing whereof Lucy was careful to avoid all mention of the "Cat's-meat Man."

"I want you to come and stay a few days with me at Hampton, Miss Alford," said Emily. "You are not looking at all well, and our nice country air will revive you after all your worries.—A week at Hampton would quite set Miss Alford up in the matter of health, wouldn't it, Aunt Fanny?"

On this Mrs. Colton, of course, seconded her niece's proposal; but Lucy was evidently at a loss to reply to this flattering invitation.

"It would be most delightful," she murmured. "I cannot thank you sufficiently for your kindness. But I think while papa is—away—I ought not to——"

And here she looked down at her threadbare merino dress, and Mrs. Jerningham divined that there lay the obstacle.

"I shall take no refusal," she said; while Lucy was wondering whether she could enter society in the pink silk she wore for the second act of the *Lady of Lyons*, or the blue moiré antique—a deceitful and spurious fabric with a cotton back—which she wore for Julia in the *Hunchback*. "I have pledged myself to carry you off to Hampton, and I must keep my word. I will not wait for any preparations in the way of toilette; you must come in the dress you have on, and my maid shall run you up two or three dresses to wear while you are with me. I have a mania for buying bargains, and I have always half a dozen unmade dresses in my wardrobe. It will be a real charity to take them off my hands, and leave me free to buy more bargains. I never can resist that insidious man who assails me, just as I have finished my shopping, with the remark that if I happen to want anything in the way of silks, he can call my attention to a most valuable opportunity. And I yield to the voice of the tempter, and burden myself with things I don't want."

After this, the question was easily settled. Mrs. Jerningham met all Lucy's difficulties in the pleasantest manner, while Mrs. Colton put in a kind word every now and then; and, encouraged by so much kindness, Lucy yielded. It was agreed that she

should write to her father, and pack her little carpet-bag of indispensables between that hour and five o'clock, during which interval the two ladies were to pay their visits, and take their luncheon, while the horses had their two hours' rest, and then return, to convey Miss Alford to Hampton in the brougham.

Lucy felt like a creature in a dream when the archetypal carriage had driven away, and she was left alone to make her arrangements for the visit to Hampton. These were not the first refined and well-bred women she had met, but never before had she been on visiting terms with the proprietress of such sables, or such an equipage, as those possessed by Mrs. Jerningham.

"How good of him to give me such kind friends!" she said to herself. She felt gratefully disposed towards Mrs. Jerningham, but her deepest gratitude was given to Laurence, the benefactor and champion who had sent her these new friends in her hour of difficulty.

She had many little duties to perform before the return of the carriage—little bills to pay, a letter to write to her father, and a post-office order to procure for the same helpless individual. After paying all debts due to landlady and tradesmen, she reserved for herself only one sovereign of the money given her by Laurence Desmond. The rest she sent to the prisoner.

"Do not think me unkind if I ask you to be very careful, dear papa," she wrote. "This money is the last we can expect to receive from Mr. Desmond. He has been more kind than words can express, and I am sure you will feel his kindness as deeply as I do."

And then came a description of the strange lady, the grand carriage, and the invitation that she would fain have refused.

"You must not imagine that I am enjoying myself while you are unhappy, poor dear papa," she continued. "I thought that to refuse Mrs. Jerningham's invitation would seem ungracious to her, and ungrateful to Mr. Desmond; so I am going to Hampton. The train will bring me to town in an hour whenever you wish to see me, and you have only to write one line to me at River Lawn—isn't that a pretty name for a place?—telling me your wish, in order to be immediately obeyed. I have told Mrs. Wilkins that you may return at any moment, and she has promised to make you comfortable in my absence. She seemed awe-struck by the sight of Mrs. Jerningham's carriage, and has adopted quite a new tone to me within the last hour. You know how disrespectful she has been lately. I think she suspected that you had been taken to that dreadful place; but the appearance of the carriage and the settlement of her account have quite changed her. I hope you do not sit in draughts, and that you take care to secure a corner near the fire. It almost

breaks my heart to think of you sitting in that long, dreary room, while I am going away to a pleasant house. It seems almost heartless in me to go; but, believe me, I only do so to avoid offending Mr. Desmond.

"May God bless you, dear papa! and support you in your hour of trouble. Your ever loving child,

"LUCY."

After this letter to her father, Miss Alford wrote a note to Laurence Desmond, thanking him for his kindness to herself, and putting in a timid little plea for the prisoner in Whitecross Street. By the time these letters were written and posted, and Lucy's modest carpet-bag packed, the brougham was again a thing of wonder for the inhabitants of Paul's Terrace, more especially wonderful upon this occasion by reason of two flaming lamps, that flashed like meteors upon the darkness of Ball's Pond. Lucy could not help feeling a faint thrill of pride as she stepped into this vehicle, attended to the very door by the obsequious Mrs. Wilkins, who insisted on getting in the way of that grandiose creature in livery whose business it was to open and shut the door of the brougham.

Mrs. Jerningham's bays performed the distance between London and Hampton in about two hours; and during the long drive Lucy told the two ladies a good deal about herself and her father, and the old days in which Laurence Desmond had read for "greats" at Henley. All this she related without egotism, and urged thereto by Emily, who seemed interested in all Miss Alford had to tell, but most especially interested in her account of Mr. Desmond's reading for honours.

"And was he very industrious?" she asked; "did he work very hard?"

"Well, yes, I believe he read sometimes at night; but I was only nine years old, you know," replied Lucy, "and poor mamma used to send me to bed very early. Mr. Desmond and his two friends used to be on the river nearly all day, sometimes training for boat-races, you know, and sometimes fishing—spinning for jack, I think they used to call it."

"But surely it was not by spinning for jack that Mr. Desmond got his degree?"

"Oh, no! of course he did read, you know, because he came to Henley on purpose to read. I believe there used to be a great deal of reading done every night after the shutters were shut and the lamps lighted. But Mr. Desmond used to say he could never work well until he had used up his idleness; and he declared that he never felt himself in such good training for cramming Thicksides as after a long day's punting."

"Cramming Thicksides!" cried Mrs. Jerningham, in amazement; "what, in mercy's name, did he mean by that?"

"Oh, Thicksides is the Oxonian name for Thucydides!"

"How very charming! And at night, when the lamps were lighted, Mr. Desmond and your father used to cram Thicksides?'

"Yes, and Cicero; the Philippics, you know, and that sort of thing; and all the Greek tragedies, and Demosthenes, and Mill's Logic, and the Gospels. I believe Mr. Desmond's friends were both ploughed. Papa said that they were not nearly so clever as he."

"And your papa thinks him very clever, I suppose?"

"Papa says he is one of the best Balliol men; and Balliol is a college where they work very hard, you know."

"Indeed! Miss Alford, I know nothing of the kind."

"I beg your pardon! I only said 'you know' in a general sense, you know. Papa has often told me what a silly, vulgar habit it is, you know; but I go on saying it in spite of myself."

"It is not such a very grave offence, Lucy. May I call you Lucy, Miss Alford?"

"Oh! if you please. I should like it much better than for you to call me Miss Alford."

"In that case it shall always be Lucy," replied Mrs. Jerningham, kindly; "Lucy is such a pretty name, and suits you admirably."

She was thinking of Wordsworth's familiar lines:—

> "A creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food."

"I am not fit for 'human nature's daily food,'" she said to herself. "I am what the French call *difficile;* not easily pleased by others, never quite satisfied with myself. The circumstances of my life have always been exceptional; but I doubt if I should have been a happy woman under happier circumstances."

The question of how much character may or may not be moulded and influenced by circumstances, was a psychological problem too difficult for Mrs. Jerningham's comprehension. She knew that she was not happy; and there were times when she was inclined to ascribe her unhappiness to some radical defect in her own character, rather than to her exceptional position.

She found herself pleased and interested by Lucy Alford; but she was nevertheless bent on measuring the extent of that young lady's acquaintance with Laurence Desmond.

"I am glad to think that your father considers Mr. Desmond so clever," she said, presently, returning to the charge.

"Oh, yes, he is very clever, and as good as he is clever," replied Lucy, with more enthusiasm than was quite agreeable to her questioner.

"You have seen a great deal of him in the course of your life?"

"Oh yes; I used to be with him and papa a great deal at Henley, in the punt, you know, when I was nine years old. I used to catch flies for them—blue-bottles, and all sorts of flies. It seemed very cruel to the flies, you know; but Mr. Desmond was so kind to me, and I was pleased to be of any use to him."

"And have you seen him very often since you were nine years old?"

"Oh no, very seldom; never until two or three weeks ago, when papa wrote to ask him for an introduction to a London manager. But in that short time he has been so kind, so good, so generous, so thoughtful, that——"

The rest was expressed by a little choking sob.

"I am glad to think that he is kind, and generous, and thoughtful," said Mrs. Jerningham, very seriously. "He is my friend, Lucy—a very old and intimate friend; and I am more pleased to hear him praised than to hear any praise of myself. Your gratitude for his kindness touches me very deeply."

There was a tone of appropriation in this speech which was felt rather than understood by Lucy. She was conscious that this grand lady of the irreproachable brougham claimed Laurence Desmond for her own, and she began to perceive how frail a link was that accidental association which bound him to herself.

"Laurence has asked me to be your friend, Lucy," continued Mrs. Jerningham, and something that was almost pain smote Lucy's heart as the lady uttered his Christian name for the first time in her hearing. "He has requested me to be your friend and adviser; and it will be a great pleasure to me to obey his wish. Of course it will be much better for you to accept friendship from me than from him, Lucy. That kind of thing could not go on for ever, you know."

"Oh, of course not," murmured Lucy. She was too innocent to perceive the real drift of this remark. She thought that Mrs. Jerningham was considering the business entirely from a pecuniary point of view. "Of course, I know that Mr. Desmond could not afford to go on helping papa as he has been helping him," she said; "it would be very shameful of us to wish it."

"*You* could not afford to receive money from him any longer, Lucy," returned the voice of worldly wisdom from the lips of Mrs. Jerningham. "It would be a most improper position for you to occupy. In future you must tell me your troubles, and I shall be always glad to help you; but all confidences between you and Mr. Desmond had much better come to an end."

"I do not want to confide in him; that is to say, I do not want to ask favours of him," replied poor Lucy, much distressed by this stern dictum. "But my friendship for him cannot come

to an end. I cannot so easily forget his kindness. If I were at the Antipodes, and with no hope ever to see his face again, I should think of him with the same regard and gratitude to my dying day. If I live to be an old, old woman, I shall always think of him as my truest and kindest friend."

"Your grateful feelings are very creditable; but I hope you will not express yourself in that manner to other people, Lucy. You talk in a way that sounds theatrical, and rather bold. A girl of your age ought not to be so very enthusiastic about any gentleman."

"Not when he has been so good, so generous?"

"Not under any circumstances. You may be grateful as Androcles, or the lion—which was it that was grateful, by the bye?—but you need not indulge in that kind of rhapsody; it is not in very good taste."

This was the first time Lucy had heard of taste, in the modern-society sense of the word. She submitted to Mrs. Jerningham's sentence. The voice of a lady, admired and respected by Laurence Desmond, must be sacred as the voices of Delphos.

The carriage rolled into the shrubberied drive at River Lawn presently, and then Lucy beheld flashing lights, and a vestibule with bright tesselated pavement, and pictures on the walls, and open doors leading into the brightest, prettiest rooms she had ever seen in her life; and in the dining-room was set forth that banquet so dear to the heart of every true woman—a tea-dinner. Quaint old silver tea and coffee service, turquoise-blue cups and saucers, an antique oval tea-tray, a pierced cake-basket that would make a collector's mouth water; substantial fare in the way of tongue and chicken and game-pie; a room adorned as only perfect taste, allied with wealth, can adorn a room, were the things that greeted Lucy Alford's eyes as she looked round her for the first time in her new friend's home. It was scarcely strange that such a room should seem to her almost like a picture of fairy-land, as contrasted with those dingy lodgings in Ball's Pond, where the last few weeks of her existence had been spent. She thought of her father in his dreary prison-ward, and she could not quite put away from her the feeling that she had no right to be amidst such pleasant surroundings.

CHAPTER XXI.

DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS.

THE fair river that wound like a broad ribbon of silver through the lands of Harold Jerningham was not more tranquil than the course of existence at the bailiff's cottage. M. de Bergerac's great book grew slowly and steadily in bulk, and developed day by day from chaos into form; while Helen's simple life went on,

eventless and purposeless, perhaps, if measured by the ordinary standard by which the world measures existence, every hour filled with pleasant occupation, every morning bringing with it some new delight. Her father, her books, her dog, her piano, her birds, her dairy, her poultry-yard,—these were the delights of Helen's life, and these left her no leisure for the ordinary aspirations of young-ladyhood. It is not to be supposed that so charming a damsel was neglected or ignored by neighbouring families. Helen had to receive an occasional morning visitor, and was obliged sometimes to withdraw the declaration that she never visited, in favour of some friendly matron hunting pretty girls for a garden-party, or presentable pianistes for a musical evening. But she went out very seldom. Her home-life was inexpressibly dear to her, and an evening's absence from the beloved father's side seemed like a break in her existence. What could people give her at garden-parties or musical evenings that was equal to her father's society?

"I meet no one who can talk like you, papa," she said on returning, blooming and radiant, from a neighbouring mansion, not elated because she had been enjoying herself especially abroad, but because she was pleased to come home. "Why should I take the trouble to put on this white dress, and crush all the little flounces that poor Nanon insists upon ironing with her own hands, in order to hear people say stupid things, when I am always so much happier with you in this dear old room? I am afraid I must be a blue-stocking, papa, for I cannot enjoy the perpetual talk about operas and morning-concerts, and new curates and croquet-parties, that I hear whenever I go out."

It was very pleasant to Eustace Thorburn to discover that the country society had so little fascination for his employer's daughter. It had been anguish to him to see her borne away to halls of dazzling light, or paradisaic croquet-grounds, whither he might not follow. He loved her with a young man's love—pure, honest, and enthusiastic. The depth and intensity, the abnegation of self, which constitutes the religion of love, were as yet only latent in his breast. It was the summer-morning of life, and the barque that bore the lovers onward upon the enchanted waters was floating with the stream. The hour of the turning tide would be the hour to test the strength of Eustace Thorburn's devotion. At present all was smooth and bright and happy, and the affection which these young people felt for one another grew imperceptibly in the hearts of each. Helen did not know why her life seemed to her so perfect in its calm happiness. Eustace believed that he was battling manfully with his own weakness, and that every day brought him nearer to the hour of victory.

"I am resigned to the thought that Helen de Bergerac may

never be my wife," he said to himself; "and yet I am almost happy."

He might have said, quite happy; for a happiness more perfect than any man can hope to experience twice in his life made his new home a paradise for him. He was happy because, unknown to himself, he still hoped; he was happy because he was still the friend and companion of his idol.

"What is to become of me when my task here is finished?" he asked himself. But this was a line of thought which he dared not pursue; beyond that bright home all was darkness.

M. de Bergerac looked on at the little Arcadian comedy and wondered. The scholar was too unskilled in the study of youthful hearts to read the mysterious cipher in which the secret thoughts of lovers are written. He saw that the young people were very well pleased with each other's society, but he saw no more; nor did he disturb himself by doubts or apprehensions. Harold Jerningham contemplated the same comedy with angry feelings in his breast; he envied these young people the brightness of their morning. The feeling was mean and detestable. Mr. Jerningham knew this, and hated himself; but the bitter envy of youth and happiness was not to be banished from his heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," cries the Prophet; and if it was even so with the people of God, what must be with such a man as Mr. Jerningham, who had never recognized any other god than himself, and the fancy or the passion of the hour, and who at his best had known for his only law that vague instinct—half pride, half shame—which bad men call honour?

It is quite impossible that a man who performs no duty and cherishes no ambition can escape that fatal decline which leads to the region of moral darkness. Harold Jerningham had cherished some faint hope of distinction at the beginning of his life. He had made his venture in the lottery, and had drawn not exactly a blank, but a number so infinitely beneath his expectation that it seemed to him as worthless.

There had been a time when the master of Greenlands, fresh from a successful university career, and steeped to the very lips in Greek verse, had fancied himself a poet. The dream, which was so sweet to Eustace Thorburn, had shed its glamour over his pathway. Even the sweets of fame had come to him in some small measure, but not that laurel-crown which he had hoped to win; so he shrugged his shoulders, laughed at his critics, and wandered away to the sunny lands where life itself is unwritten poetry. Young Jerningham of Brazenose was a very brilliant young man, but he lacked that divine spark, that touch of the superhuman, which men call genius. He had not the fire, the pluck, the energy, the passion of that young lordling who an-

swered his contemptuous critics, not with *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*—that was only the *tour de force* of a pamphleteer—but with *Childe Harold*, the inspired verse of a poet, supremely unconscious of public and of critics, under the sway of a possession no less potent than that which gave prophetic voice to Cassandra.

Mr. Jerningham had discovered that a handsome face, a manner eminently successful in feminine society, an intimate acquaintance with classic literature, a fine fortune, and some ambition for literary fame, do not make a Byron; and to be anything less than Byron seemed to Mr. Jerningham synonymous with failure. "I am like the tiger," said Byron. "If I do not succeed with the first spring, I go back growling to my cave." Mr. Jerningham was also like the tiger. He went back to his cave, and remained there. "Cæsar or nothing," he had said to himself, when he made his venture. The result was nothing.

The fact that he had thus aspired and failed, may have had some slight influence upon his feelings on the subject of Eustace Thorburn. The young man's ambitious hopes were never paraded. It was only by the glow upon his face, and the warmth of his words, when he praised the poets of the past, that he unconsciously revealed the bent of his mind. For the rest, Mr. Jerningham heard a great deal about the young poet's hopes and dreams from Helen, who was his confidante and adviser.

"He helps me so kindly with all my studies, that it is the least I can do to be interested in his poems," Helen said, as if she felt bound to apologize for the warmth of her interest in this subject. "He is writing a long poem, something in the style of Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, only with a much prettier story for the groundwork; and he has read me little bits—such noble verses! And then he writes an occasional short poem, just as the fancy strikes him. Some of the short poems have been published in the magazines. Perhaps you would like to see them?"

Helen rose as if to go in search of the magazines, but Mr. Jerningham stopped her with a hasty gesture of deprecation.

"Please spare me the short poems, my dear Helen," he said. "I have given up reading my Horace and Catullus, since I have passed the poetic age. Don't ask me to read magazine verses."

Helen looked very much disappointed.

"I dare say, two thousand years hence, learned men will be disputing about a false quantity in one of Mr. Thorburn's poems," said her father. "Not every poet can hope to be thought great in his own century. Do you remember that preface of Webster's to the *White Devil*, in which he names all the dramatists of the day, and last of all, 'without wrong so to be named, the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakspeare'?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Jerningham. "I don't think either Shakspeare or Molière had the faintest suspicion that he was to be immortal. It is only once in a thousand years that a poet drinks the cup of triumph that Byron drained to the very lees. He tasted the lees, and died with the bitterness of them on his lips. He might have tasted nothing but lees had he lived longer. For one man who dies too soon, a hundred die too late. There is a golden opportunity for effective death in every man's career, but few are wise enough to seize it. If the first Napoleon had fallen at Austerlitz, he would have taken high rank among the demigods; nay, De Quincey suggests that even Commodus might have made a shred of character for himself by dying immediately after a triumphant display of his genius as a toxophilite."

Mr. Jerningham's distaste for his friend's secretary did not keep him away from the cottage. He came at all times and seasons, and if his only possibility of happiness had been found in that house, he could not have seemed less inclined to leave it or more eager to return to it. Weeks, and even months, passed, and he still remained in England, spending a few days every now and then at the bijou house in Park Lane, but making Greenlands his head-quarters. Capricious in all his movements, he came when he pleased, and departed when he pleased. Theodore de Bergerac loved and trusted him, as it was his nature to love and trust those whom he thought worthy of his friendship. The welcome that awaited him was always equally cordial. He had never imagined so calm a haven.

"If I could spend the rest of my life here, I might die a good Christian," he said to himself; until, little by little, he came to understand that those feelings which made the bailiff's cottage so pleasant to him were not altogether Christianlike.

He hated Eustace Thorburn. He envied him his youth, his hopefulness, his chances of future distinction; above all, he envied him the love of Helen de Bergerac. Yes, there was the sting. Youth, hope, chances of future glory, might all have been given to this young man, and Harold Jerningham would have let him go by with a careless sneer. But Eustace Thorburn had more than these gifts; he had the love of a pure and bright young creature, whose purity and brightness had touched the heart of this middle-aged sybarite as it had never been touched before. His fancy, his vanity, his pride of conquest, had been the motive power to sustain him in bygone victories. He had dreamed his dreams, and had awakened suddenly to see Fancy's radiant vision vanish before the chill gray light of Reality's cheerless dawn.

But this time the dream was fairer than any of those old, forgotten visions. This time the heart of the man, and not the

poet's fancy only, was touched and subjugated. It was many years since the master of Greenlands had bade a formal farewell to the follies and delusions of youth, and he had believed the farewell eternal. And now, in a moment, unbidden, dreams, delusions, and folly returned to hold him with fatal sway; and in his self-communings he confessed that it was no common sentiment which made Helen's presence so delightful, and no common prejudice that rendered Eustace Thorburn so odious.

He confessed to himself as much as this; and knowing this, he lingered at Greenlands, and came day after day to sit beside his friend's hearth, or loiter in his friend's garden. And why should he not snatch the brief hours of happiness which yet remained for him—the Indian summer of his life?

"I am an old man," he said to himself; "at least, in the eyes of this girl I must seem an old man. She will never know that I regard her with any warmer sentiment than a fatherly kind of friendship. She will dream her own dreams, and think her own thoughts, unconscious of her influence on mine. And by and by, after a few months of sentimental flirtation, she will marry this young secretary, or some other man, young, self-satisfied, good-looking, empty-headed, and utterly unable to understand how divine a treasure the fates have bestowed upon him."

With such philosophy as this did Mr. Jerningham trifle with his conscience, or rather that vague sense of honour which stood him in stead of conscience. But there were times when philosophy gave poor comfort to the soul of this unprincipled egotist, who until now had never known what it was to set a seal upon his lips, or a curb upon his will. There were hours of envious rage, of dark remorse, of vain, passionate broodings on the things that might have been; there were hours in which the spirits of evil claimed Harold Jerningham for their own, and walked about with him, and hovered around his bed as he slept, and made his dreams hideous with shapeless horrors. He looked back upon his early dreams, and laughed at their folly. He was like that French libertine who, in writing of his youthful caprices, said, "My hour for loving truly and profoundly had not yet come." That fateful hour, which comes to every man, had come to this one too late.

What special charm in this girl enthralled his mind and melted his heart? He did not know. It could scarcely be her beauty, for his life had been spent amongst beautiful women, and his heart had long ago become impervious to the fascination of a fair and noble face. It may have been her innocence, her youth, her gentleness, that had subdued this world-weary cynic—the poetic charm of her surroundings, the sweet repose which seemed a part of the very atmosphere she breathed.

Yes, in this youthful purity there lurked the potent charm

that held Harold Jerningham. The girl, with her sweet, confiding face and pure thoughts, the rustic life, the perfume of Arcadia, composed the subtle charm that had intoxicated Mr. Jerningham's senses. What is so delightful as novelty to an idle, *blasé* creature of the Jerningham type? The life at Greenlands had all the charm of novelty; it was fresh, piquant, exhilarating, because of its very innocence; and as it had never been in Mr. Jerningham's creed to deny himself any pleasure, he lingered at the neglected house in which his father and mother had died. He spent his evenings at the bailiff's cottage, and left the issue to fate.

"She will never know how tenderly her father's old friend loves her," he said to himself; "and at the worst I may prevent her throwing herself away upon an adventurer."

CHAPTER XXII.

DANIEL MAYFIELD'S COUNSEL.

THE great book and his own studies afforded Mr. Thorburn ample occupation for all his days and nights. If his days had been twice as long as they were, the young man would have found work for every hour. He was very ambitious, and he had that passionate love of learning for its own sake which marks the predestined scholar. But with all a Bentley or a Porson's delight in the niceties of a Greek verb or the use of a preposition, he was as free from pedantry as from every other affectation. In the garden, on the river, by the piano, or on the croquet-lawn, he was a match for the most empty-headed bachelor in Berkshire; and if he played croquet on mathematical principles, he was careful to keep that fact to himself. He had a knack of doing everything well, and even Mr. Jerningham was fain to admit that he was in tone and manner irreproachable. Never was the boyish candour of light-hearted youth more pleasantly blended with the self-possession of accomplished manhood. Grave and earnest, when good taste required that he should be serious; in his moments of expansion, full of enthusiasm and vivacity; always deferential to superior age and attainments, yet entirely without sycophancy; profoundly respectful in his intercourse with women—Eustace Thorburn was a man who made friends for himself unconsciously.

"I am very proud of my daughter," M. de Bergerac said to Harold Jerningham one day, when they had been talking of the secretary; "but I should have been prouder still of such a son as that young man."

"I have no passion for pattern young men," replied Mr. Jerningham. "I dare say your model secretary is very amiable. You pay him a salary for being amiable, you see, and he occu-

pies a very pleasant position in your house. But I cannot quite understand how you could bring yourself to admit a stranger into the bosom of your family. The arrangement reminds me a little of those curious advertisements one sees in the *Times*. A family who occupy a house too large for their requirements invite a gentleman engaged in the City during the day to share the delights of their too spacious mansion; and they promise him cheerful society—imagine the horror implied in pledging yourself to be cheerful all the year round for a gentleman engaged in the City!—and the gentleman comes to be welcomed to the arms of the family who know about as much of his antecedents, or his qualities of head and heart, as if he were an inhabitant of the planet Mars. Now it seems to me that you receive Mr. Thorburn very much on the same principle."

"Not at all. I had Mr. Desmond's credentials for my secretary's character."

"And how much does Mr. Desmond know of your secretary?"

"I can scarcely tell you that. I know that Desmond's letter of recommendation was very satisfactory, and that the result has justified the letter."

"And you do not even know who and what the young man's father was?"

"I do not; but I would pledge my life upon the young man's honesty of purpose, and I am not inclined to trouble myself about his father."

This conversation was eminently provoking to Mr. Jerningham. He had of late found himself tormented by an irritating curiosity upon the subject of Eustace Thorburn. He wanted to know who and what this man was whom he envied with so iniquitous an envy, whom he hated with a hatred so utterly unprovoked. Had he good blood in his veins, this young adventurer, who carried himself with an easy grace that could scarcely have been given to a plebeian? Mr. Jerningham was a Conservative in the narrowest sense of the word, and did not believe in nature's nobility. He watched Eustace Thorburn with cold, critical eyes, and was fain to admit that in this young man there were no traces of vulgar origin.

"And they say he is like me," Mr. Jerningham said to himself. "Was I ever as handsome as that, as bright, as candid in tone and frank in manner? I think not. Life was too smooth for me when I was a young man, and prosperity spoiled me."

Mr. Jerningham looked back at the days of his youth, and remembered how prosperous they had been, and was fain to confess to himself that it might have been better for him if Fortune had been less lavish of her gifts. Absolute power is a crucial test that few men can stand. Absolute power makes a Caligula or a Heliogabalus, a Sixtus the Fourth or an Alexander

the Sixth; and do not wealth, and good looks, and youth, and a decent amount of talent, constitute a power as absolute as the dominion of imperial papal Rome?

While Mr. Jerningham lingered—idle, discontented, ill at ease—amidst that Berkshire landscape which made Eustace Thorburn's paradise, the young man's life crept on, sweet as a summer-day's dream. It had dawned upon him of late that he was not liked by the master of Greenlands, and he endured that affliction with becoming patience. He would have wished to be liked and trusted by all mankind, since his own heart knew only kindly feelings, except always against that one man who had to answer for his mother's broken life. He wished to be on good terms with everybody; but if a cynical, middle-aged gentleman chose to dislike him, he was the last man to court the cynical gentleman's liking.

"I dare say Mr. Jerningham thinks there is a kind of impertinence in my likeness to him," Eustace thought, when Harold's eyes had watched him with a more than usually disdainful gaze. "He is angry with nature herself for having made a nameless adventurer somewhat after his image. Am I like him, I wonder? Yes, I see a look of his face in my own when I look in my glass. And that woman, Mrs. Willows, told me that I reminded her of my father; so Mr. Jerningham must be like my father. I can almost fancy my father that kind of man—cold, and proud, and selfish; for I know that Mr. Jerningham is selfish, in spite of M. de Bergerac's praise of him."

The idea that Harold Jerningham must needs bear some faint resemblance to the father whom Eustace had never seen, quickened the young man's interest in him. The two men watched each other, and thought of each other, and wondered about each other, with ever-increasing interest, each seeking to fathom the hidden depths of the other's nature, each baffled by that conventional external life which raises a kind of screen between the real and the artificial man.

Mr. Jerningham was a master of the art of concealing his sentiments, and Eustace, frank, true, and young as he was, kept his gravest thoughts locked in his own breast; so, after meeting nearly every day for some months, the two men knew very little more of each other than they had known after the first week of their intercourse.

Early in June, when the garden and park, river and wood-crowned hills beyond, were looking unspeakably beautiful in the early summer, Eustace left that Arcadian paradise for a week's hard labour in the manuscript-room of the British Museum, where there were certain documents bearing upon the subject of M. de Bergerac's *magnum opus*—records of trials for witchcraft; ghastly confessions, wrung from the white lips of writhing

wretches in the torture-chambers of mediæval England; hideous details of trial and *auto da fé* in the days when the great stone scaffold stood at the gates of Seville, and the smoke and stench of burning heretics darkened the skies of Spain.

Eustace shared his Uncle Dan's lodgings on this occasion as on the last, to the delight of both. To Daniel Mayfield his nephew's presence was like a glimpse of green fields and cooling waters seen athwart the arid sands of a desert.

"You are like a summer wind, blowing the hopes and joys of my youth back to me," said Daniel, as the two dined together on the first evening. "You are not like your mother, dear boy; but you have a look of hers in your eyes when you are at your best."

"I have been told that I am like my father," said Eustace, thoughtfully.

"Told by whom?"

"By Mrs. Willows—Sarah Kimber—my mother's friend."

"Indeed! Yes; Sarah Kimber must have seen that man."

"And you never saw him?"

"Never. I was in London at the time. If I had been at Bayham, things might have been——Ah, well, we always think we could have saved our darlings from ruin or death if we had been at hand. God would not save her. But who knows if it was not better for her to have sinned, and suffered, and repented, and lived her pure, unselfish life for twenty years, to die humble and trusting, as she did, than to have married some vulgar, prosperous tradesman, and to have grown hard, and bitter, and worldly? Better for her to be the Publican than the Pharisee. You know what I am in the matter of religious opinion, Eustace; or, at any rate, you know as well as I know myself how I take Rabelais' Great Perhaps; but since your mother's death the hope of something better to come, after all this wear and tear, and drudgery and turmoil, has seemed nearer to me. The Great Perhaps has grown almost into a certainty; and sometimes at sunset, when I am walking in the busiest street in this great clamorous city, I see the sun going down in crimson glory behind the house-tops, and in the midst of all that roar and bustle, with the omnibuses rattling past, and the crowd jostling and pushing me as I tramp along, I think of the golden-paved city that has no need of either sun or moon to shine in it, but is lighted with the glory of God; and I wish that the farce were over and the curtain dropped."

Much more was said about the mild and inoffensive creature whom these two men had loved so dearly. To Eustace there was supreme comfort in this quiet talk about the unforgotten dead. After this there came more cheerful talk. Daniel Mayfield was anxious to ascertain what his nephew's life was like at Greenlands.

"It is not an unprofitable life, at any rate," he said, with a proud smile; "for those little poems you send me now and then for the magazines show a marked growth of mind. It ripens the mind; and the heart is not absorbed by the brain. That is the point. It is so difficult to keep heart and brain alive together. Do you remember what Vasari says of Giotto, '*Il renouvela l'art parcequ'il mit plus de bonté dans les têtes*'? There is *bonté* in your verses, my lad; and if Dan Mayfield is anything of a judge of literary yearlings, you may safely enter yourself for some of the great events. Of course, you will not depend upon verse-making for your daily bread. Verse-making is the Sabbath of a hard-working literary life. You will find good work to do without descending to such cab-horse labour as mine has been. And take to heart this one precept throughout your literary career: you have only one master, and that master is the British public. For your critics, if they are honest, respect and honour them with all your heart and mind; accept their blame in all humility, and be diligent to learn whatever they can teach. But when the false prophets assail you,—they who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves,—the critics who are no critics, but unsuccessful writers or trade rivals in disguise,—be on your guard, and take care of your cheese. You know the fable: the fox flattered the raven until the weak-minded bird dropped her cheese. The fox goes on another principle now-a-days, and reviles the raven; but for the same purpose. Remember my warning, Eustace, and don't drop your cheese. The public, your master, has a very plain way of expressing its opinion. If the public like your book, the public will read it; if not, the public will assuredly let it alone; and all the king's horses and all the king's men, in the way of criticism, cannot set you up or knock you down, unless the reading public is with them. Accept this brief sermon, Eustace, from a man who has lived and suffered."

Those were pleasant hours which the two men spent together, sitting late into the night, talking of books and men, of worlds seen and unseen; metaphysical, practical, poetical, theological, by turns, as the stream of talk flowed onward in its wandering way—erratic as the most wayward brook that ever strayed by hill-side and meadow.

Eustace believed in his Uncle Dan as the greatest of men; and, indeed, in close companionship, the most stolid of companions could scarcely refrain from some expression of wonder and delight on beholding so much unconscious power, such depth of thought, such wealth of fancy, such grand imaginings,—all scattered as recklessly as Daniel Mayfield scattered his more substantial possessions in the shape of sovereigns and half-crowns. A dangerous enemy, a warm friend, a pitiless

assailant, a staunch champion, large of heart and large of brain, more like Ben Jonson than Shakspeare, nearer to Dryden than to Pope, to Steele than to Addison,—such was Daniel Mayfield, essayist, reviewer, historian—what you will; always excellent, and sometimes great; but never so admirable a creature as when he sat smoking his meerschaum dreamily, and looking across the blue mists of tobacco at the nephew he loved.

"And you are really and truly happy at Greenlands?" he said, after the young man had told him a good deal about his life in Berkshire.

"Happier than I ever was before in a stranger's house," answered Eustace; "though Mr. Jerningham evidently considers me an intruder."

"Never mind Mr. Jerningham; you do not exist to please him. M. de Bergerac likes you; and Mademoiselle—she tolerates you, I suppose?"

A vivid blush betrayed that secret which Eustace Thorburn was so incapable of concealing.

"Ho, ho!" cried Daniel; "that is where we are, is it? We are in love with our employer's daughter! Take care, Eustace; that way madness lies."

"I know that," the young man answered, gravely. "I have kept that in my mind ever since I first went to Greenlands."

"Ever since? Ah, then it is an old story!"

"I know the chances are against me, and I mean to cure myself, sooner or later; unless——Well, Uncle Dan, I can't teach myself to look at this business as altogether desperate. M. de Bergerac is all goodness, generosity, simplicity; and as for Helen——Don't think me a coxcomb or a fool if I say I believe she loves me. We have been together for nearly a year, you see, like brother and sister; I teaching her Greek, she teaching me music. I play the basses of her duets—you remember how my poor mother taught me, when I was a child—and we have all kinds of tastes, and predilections, and enthusiasms in common. I cannot believe we could be so completely happy together if—if there were not something more than common sympathy between us. Don't laugh at me, Uncle Dan."

"Shall I laugh at youth, and hope, and love?" cried Daniel Mayfield. "The next thing would be to laugh at the angels in heaven.—And so she loves you, this Demoiselle de Bergerac? I wonder how she could help loving you, forsooth! Has her father any inkling of this pretty little pastoral comedy that is being enacted under his very nose?"

"I doubt it. He is simplicity itself."

"And don't you think, Eustace, that, in consideration for that sweet, child-like simplicity which so often goes with scholarship, you are bound to tell him the truth? You see,

your position in the house is a privilege which you can scarcely enjoy with the consciousness of this treasonable secret. Tell M. de Bergerac the whole truth,—your plans, your chances of future distinction,—and ascertain from his own lips whether there is any hope for you."

"And if he tells me there is no hope?"

"Well, that will seem a death-blow, of course. But if the girl really loves you, her heart will be always on your side. In that case, I should say wait, and put your trust in Time—Time, the father of Truth, as Mary Stuart called him when she wanted to obtain belief for a bouncer,—and oh, what an incredible number of royal bouncers were carried to and fro in the despatches of that period! Wait, Eustace, and when you have made a hit in the literary world, you can carry your laurel-crown to M. de Bergerac, and make an appeal against his stern decision."

"And in the meantime, while the laurels are growing for my crown, some one else will marry Helen."

"That is probable, if her love for you is only the caprice of a boarding-school miss, in which case you will be better off without her. Don't look at me so despairingly, dear boy. You cannot get five-and-forty to regard these things with the eyes of five-and-twenty. I have had my own dream and my own disappointment, and have gone my ways, and cannot tell whether I am worse or better for my loss. Do you remember that tender little essay of Charles Lamb's, in which he tells us about the children that might have been—the dear, loving, pretty creatures, who never lived except in Elia's dreams? I have my little family, too, Eustace; and of a night, when I sit alone and the candles burn dim on yonder table, they come out of the dusky corners and stand at my knee, and I talk to them, and tell them of the things that might have been if they had ever been born. And yet, how do I know that they wouldn't have turned out the veriest little rascals and scoundrels in Christendom, and the torment of my existence? I have missed the home that I once dreamt of; but I have my pipe and my rare old books, and my faithful friends who come sometimes of an evening to play a rubber with me—as Elia's friends used to come to him—and I take things quietly, and say Kismet. Be honest and true, Eustace, and leave the rest to the destiny that 'shapes our ends.'"

"I have thought that it might be my duty to tell M. de Bergerac the truth," said Eustace, thoughtfully; "but then, you see, I have set a watch upon every look and word. I have preserved my own proper position as a paid secretary with punctilious care. What harm is there in my presence in that house, where I am so happy, so long as I keep my secret?"

"But can you tell how long you may keep it?" asked the

incredulous Daniel, "or how many times you betray it in a single day to every one except that dreaming student, who has evidently no eyes to see anything that lies beyond his own desk? Your girlish blush betrayed you to me—blushes, and looks, and tones, and sighs will betray you to the demoiselle, and then some day the great discovery will be made all at once, and you will find yourself in a false position."

"Yes, Uncle Dan; I begin to think you are right. I should be a scoundrel to profit by that dear old man's simplicity. I will tell him the truth, and leave Greenlands. Ah, you cannot imagine how happy I have been there. And then, I am so useful to M. de Bergerac. The great book will come to a standstill again, or at any rate go on very slowly. And I am so interested in my work. It seems very hard, Uncle Dan; but I suppose it must be done."

"It had better be done, my dear boy. Besides, you may not lose by your candour. M. de Bergerac may tell you to remain."

"I cannot hope that. But I will take your advice; the truth is always best."

"Always best and wisest."

It was thus decided. Eustace wrung his uncle's hand in silence, and retired, pale and sorrowful. The elder man felt this keenly; but he had something of the Spartan's feelings in his relations with his beloved nephew.

"I have kept him away from me because I love him, and now I take him from this girl because I love him," he thought, as he smoked his last pipe in cheerless solitude. "I am more watchful of his honour than ever I was of my own."

There was very little more said about Greenlands during the few remaining days of Eustace Thorburn's visit. His face told Daniel that the die was cast. The young Spartan had determined to do his duty.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BETWEEN EDEN AND EXILE.

On the last night of Eustace Thorburn's abode in his uncle's lodgings, the two men sat very late, talking earnestly, the elder watching the face of the younger with more than usual tenderness.

"I dare say the future seems a little dark to you, dear lad," he began, softly, after they had talked of all the things except that which was nearest to the hearts of both. "I won't try to comfort you with the usual philosophical truisms about the foolishness of youthful fancies. I won't preach the *vanitas vanitatum* of worn-out middle age to hoping, dreaming, despairing youth. Keep the dream, boy, even if there is a bitter flavour of despair

mingled with the sweetness of it. Keep the dream. Such dreams are the guardian angels of youth, the patron-saints of manhood. I have my patron-saint, and I pray to her sometimes, and confess my sins to her, and receive absolution, and am comforted. To my eyes Mademoiselle de Bergerac would most likely be only a pretty young person, with blue eyes—I think you said blue eyes—and a white mustin frock. But if she seem an angel to you, enthrone her in your heart of hearts. A man is all the better for carrying an angel about with him, even if it be only an angel of his own making."

And then, after a pause, Daniel went on. "About yo future career as a man of letters, I think you need have no misgiving. Those little verses which you submitted to me in such fear and trembling have made their mark. They have gone straight to the hearts of the people. The rising generation always elects its own poet. The students of the Quartier Latin knew Alfred de Musset's verses by heart, and spouted and sang them, before they were reprinted from the magazine where they first appeared. M. de Lamartine thought very small things of the youngster, just as Byron thought very small things of Monsieur Lamartine himself. No, Eustace, I have no fear for your future. When you leave Greenlands, it shall not be for the smoke and riot of London. You must take a lodging at some pretty village by the river, and write your book or your poem as your guardian angel directs; and if your heart is broken, and you put it into your book, so much the better. Your heart can be patched up again by and by: and in the meantime the public likes a book with a genuine broken heart in it. Byron used to break his heart once a year, and send Murray the pieces."

"I could not trade upon my sorrows as Byron did."

"Because you are not Byron. He did not trade upon his sorrows. That is a true saying of Owen Meredith's, 'Genius is greater than man. Genius does what it must, and talent does what it can.' I quote from memory. Byron's was genius—the real fire; the supernatural force that is given to a man to use, but seldom given him to govern. Byron was the Ajax of poets, —abused, distraught, roaring like a bull in his mighty pain,—and a demigod."

After this there came a long and animated discourse upon Byron and his successors. Of all things, Eustace loved best to talk of poetry and poets, from Homer to Tennyson. What mortal creature does not like to talk "shop?" And then, when the two men had wearied themselves with the pleasant excitement of debate, there was a silence of some minutes, which was broken abruptly by Daniel Mayfield.

"I made a discovery the other day, Eustace," he said. "I

have had half a mind to tell you nothing about it; but perhaps it is as well you should be told."

"What kind of discovery, Uncle Dan?"

"A discovery about—well—about the author of *Dion*."

"What? Have you found out who he is?"

"No," replied Daniel, very gravely; "I am no wiser as to his name and status: but I have found out that he was a villain, and is a villain still, if he lives, I dare say; for I don't think so base a wretch as that would be likely to amend with age. I doubt if it will ever be any good to you to know more of your father than you knew when your poor mother died; but you have wished to be wiser, and I have humoured your wish. Do you remember what I said to you after I read *Dion?*"

"I remember every word."

"I told you then that the author of that book must have been the kind of man to fascinate such a girl as your mother. I have met with another book written by the same man, and have read it as carefully as I read the first. Eustace, I believe that man was your father."

"You—you believe that?"

"Yes," returned Daniel, earnestly. "There is a picture of your mother's girlhood in the book I have been reading—a likeness too close to be accidental."

"Let me see it, Uncle Dan! let me see that book. Let me only assure myself that the man who wrote it was——"

"What would you do if you were sure of that?"

"I would find him—or his grave."

The young man had risen, and stood before his kinsman, breathless, eager, ready to confront the universe in his passionate desire to avenge the wrongs of the dead. Standing thus, he looked like a sculptor's ideal image of righteous anger.

Daniel Mayfield looked up at him with a sad smile.

"And then," he said; "and then—what then? If you find a grave, will you trample or spit upon it? Surely it would be but a sorry vengeance to insult the dead. And if you find this man in the flesh, what will you do to him? Your face tells me you would like to kill him. You look like Orestes newly come from the temple of Loxias Apollo, charged with his dreadful duty. But Orestes did not seem any the happier for having killed his mother. The primitive instinct must always be—kill; the thirst for blood. It is only human nature to want to kill the man who has offended you, and the modern horse-whipping is a feeble substitute for the exploded duel. But then Christianity comes in, with its law of sufferance and submission. No, dear lad, I cannot believe that any good could come of a meeting between you and your father, unless——"

"Unless what, Uncle Dan?" asked Eustace, when the other paused.

"Unless, by his affection for you, he could atone for his desertion of your mother."

"Atone for that!" cried the young man. "Do you think any favours that man could bestow on me would blot out the remembrance of her wrongs? Do you think I could be so mean as to sell my heritage of vengeance for some mess of pottage in the shape of worldly advantage? No, Uncle Dan; she is dead, and there is no such thing as atonement. It is too late—too late! While she lived she was ready to forgive; nature made her to love and pardon. If he had come then, and she had forgiven him, I could have forgiven for her—with her. But she is gone. That man permitted her to die alone; and if I could forgive him the wrongs that blighted her life, I could not forgive him that last wrong—her lonely death-bed. And do you think he cares for my love or my forgiveness? The man who could leave my mother to her lonely fate for twenty years is not likely to be suddenly possessed with affection for her son."

"The day may come when you will be a son whom any father would be proud to claim."

"Let him claim me in that day, if he dare," answered Eustace, with kindling eyes. "I belong to the dead. And now, Uncle Dan, tell me what this book is, and how you came by it."

"That part of the business is commonplace enough. I told you I knew a handy scrub of a man, good at picking up any out-of-the-way book I may happen to want. I commissioned this man to hunt the secondhand booksellers for a copy of *Dion*—strange that neither you nor I ever speculated on the author of *Dion* having written other books! My man hunted without result as regards *Dion:* but one morning he came to me with a couple of thin volumes, bound in gray paper-covered boards, and looking very dingy in comparison with the gaudy cloth and gilt lettering that obtains now-a-days. He had hunted in vain for *Dion*, he informed me; but in the course of his search he had come across this other book by the author of *Dion*. The book is yonder, in that parcel.—No," cried Daniel, pushing the young man gently aside; "you shall not look at the book while you are with me. *That* is a subject I do not care to talk about. Carry the parcel down to Greenlands with you, and read the book quietly—at night, in your own room. You will know little more of your father after you have read it than you know now. The book is a study in morbid anatomy; it is the revelation of an utterly selfish nature, and the writer is an unconscious moralist. *Vanitas vanitatum* is the unwritten refrain of his song."

"Was the book a success, like *Dion?*"

"It was not. I have taken the trouble to refer to the literary journals for the year in which this second book was published. In some it is passed over with a few cold words of approval, in

others unnoticed; in one it forms the subject of what French critics call a *sanglant article*. The book wants all that is best in *Dion*—the freshness, the youth, the young romance that plays at bo-peep behind a mask of world-weariness. There is an interval of ten years between the two books. In the second the writer is really *blasé*. He is ten times more egotistical, more contemptuous and suspicious of his fellow-men—more everything that is bad. He has ceased to enjoy anything in life. He has no enjoyment even in his writing; indeed, he writes with the air of a man who knows he will only be read by inferior creatures, and one expects him at every moment to throw down the pen. One cannot read the book without yawning, for one feels that the man yawned while he was writing it."

"And in this cold epitome of his selfish life he writes of my mother?"

"Yes."

"And throughout the book you believe it is of himself he writes?"

"Of that I am certain. A man has a tone in writing of himself that he never has when his subject is only some figment of the brain. There is a passion, an acrimony, in genuine autobiography not to be mistaken. I do not say that this book is a plain narration of facts. There is no doubt considerable dressing-up and disguising of events; but the under-current of reality is obvious to the least experienced reader. There is one point that puzzles—I must own perplexes—me beyond measure. It was perhaps a mistaken delicacy which induced me to respect your mother's silence about all things relating to that bad man. If I had found this book during her lifetime, I should have broached this painful subject, and compelled her to tell me all."

"But why—why?" Eustace asked, with breathless eagerness. "What had you to learn more than those letters tell us,—that he was a villain, without heart or conscience, and that she was young and guileless, and loved him only too dearly?"

"There are passages in that book which have made me think that the relations between this man and my sister were something more than we have believed."

"You think that he married my mother?"

"I am disposed to think so. But the marriage—if it took place—could hardly have been an ordinary marriage. His allusions to it are very vague; but it seems as if, whatever the ceremonial was, its legal importance was only known to this man himself."

"Why do you think this?"

"From certain faint hints here and there. 'If she only knew her legal hold upon me,' he writes; 'if she were a woman of the world, and knew her power.' There is some hidden meaning in

these half-sentences; I know not what. In a record of mixed reality and fiction, who is to say where reality ends and fiction begins? But you will read the book, and then judge for yourself."

Eustace Thorburn went back to Greenlands, depressed, but not utterly disheartened. He knew that his uncle had urged upon him the only honourable course open to him in his relations with M. de Bergerac. It would have been sweet to him to live on for ever in that friendly companionship with the bright and gentle creature who had welcomed him to her home with such simple kindness. And now reflection had convinced him that it was necessary to resign the dear privilege of this innocent companionship, he felt more keenly than he had felt hitherto all the sweetness of his life at Greenlands, and the dreariness of any life that could come after it. His ambition would be left to him; that wonderful radiant high-road which every young man believes in—the *viâ sacra* that leads straight across the untrodden wilderness of the future to the Temple of Fame—would still await the coming of his eager feet. But even that sacred road would seem dreary and desolate if the pole-star of hope were darkened; or, in plainer words, it must seem to him but a poor thing to make his mark in the world of letters, if he were not to be blest with Helen de Bergerac's love.

He returned to Greenlands by the same pathway which he had trodden just one year before, when he went a stranger to M. de Bergerac's house. Ah, how unutterably beautiful the Berkshire landscape seemed to him in its ripe, rich midsummer loveliness! High tangled hedge, winding lane, distant hill, and woodland shone before him like a picture too divine for earth.

"And I am to leave all this, and to leave her!" he thought. "I am to be self-banished from a home that Horace might have loved, and from the tranquil life which is a poet's best education. If such a sacrifice as this be duty, it is very hard."

For the first time in his life this young man found himself before the altar on which he was to immolate his happiness. In the existence of every man there comes the hour in which he must needs sacrifice his first-born, or live inglorious, with the remorseful consciousness that he has shrunk from the performance of a duty. The altar is there, and Isaac, and the knife is given to him. Heaven help the weak wretch if his courage fail him in that awful moment, and he refuse to complete the propitiation.

Eustace Thorburn approached his altar resolute, but very sorrowful, and the voice of the tempter pleaded with the casuistry of an Escobar.

"Why not stop, at least, till the book is finished?" said the tempter. "You will be doing your kind employer a disservice by depriving him of your labour. Your mighty secret can do

no harm so long as it is securely locked in your own breast, and are you so weak a fool that you must needs betray yourself?"

And hereupon the stern voice of Duty took up the argument. "What warranty can you give for the preservation of your secret?" asked the cold, calm matron. "A word, a look from that foolish chit, Mademoiselle de Bergerac, and the story would be told. As for the great book, which is, no doubt, foredoomed to be the ruin of some too-confiding publisher, you may give M. de Bergerac almost as much assistance in London as you can give him in Berkshire."

Eustace heard voices and gay laughter in the garden as he drew near the gate in the holly-hedge, and amongst other voices the low, gentlemanlike tones of Harold Jerningham. Hephaestus barked a noisy welcome as the young man opened the gate. M. de Bergerac and Mr. Jerningham were sitting by a tea-table under the chestnut-trees, deep in a learned dispute upon the history of Islamism; while Helen busied herself with the cups and saucers, and looked up every now and then to join in the argument, or to laugh at the acrimony of the disputants.

"So Mr. Jerningham has not left Berkshire, although he talked of starting for a yachting expedition to Norway last week," thought Eustace, not too well pleased to see the master of Greenlands so completely at home in that dear abode which he was himself so soon to leave.

Helen started up from the tea-table with a little exclamation of delight as the returning traveller came across the lawn. She blushed as she welcomed him; but blushes at eighteen mean very little. Mr. Jerningham stopped in the middle of a sentence, and watched the young lady with attentive eyes as she shook hands with her father's secretary.

"We are so pleased to see you back again, Mr. Thorburn," she said. "We have missed you so much—haven't we, papa?"

"Yes, my dear, I have been very much at a loss for my kind assistant," answered M. de Bergerac. "Would you imagine it possible, Thorburn, that any man can pretend to doubt the original genius and creative power of Mahomet?"

And hereupon M. de Bergerac entered upon a long disquisition on the subject that was dearest to his heart, and Eustace had to listen in reverential silence, while he was languishing to tell Helen about the little commissions he had executed for her in town, or to inquire into the health of her song-birds, or the economy of the poultry-yard to which she devoted so much care. He wanted some excuse for looking at her sweet face and hearing her beloved voice, and all the poetry of Mohammedanism seemed dull and prosaic to him when compared with the magical charm of the commonest observation this young lady could utter. It is given to youth and beauty to drop pearls and diamonds from their lips un-

consciously—pearls and diamonds invisible to common eyes, it is true, but the most precious of all gems for that one person to whom the speaker seems at once an angel and a goddess.

For that one evening Eustace Thorburn permitted himself to be unutterably happy. So magical a light does true love shed on the scene it illumines, that the lover's eye is blinded for the moment to all that lies beyond the region thus glorified. The future scarcely existed for the mind of Eustace Thorburn that happy midsummer evening. He lived in the present; and this quaint old garden, these chestnut-trees, this white-robed maiden seated under the shadow, dim and ghost-like in the twilight, constituted the world. The great canopy of heaven, and the young moon, and all the stars, the murmuring river, and shadowy woods and distant hills, had been created for those two. She was Eve, and he was Adam, and this was Paradise. The tones of the two sages disputing about the Sheeahs and the Soonnees might have been the murmurings of the west wind for any consciousness that Eustace had of their neighbourhood when once he was released from the duty of listening to M. de Bergerac, and free to converse with Helen.

And yet, in the breast of one of the sages there beat a heart from which the pains and passions of youth had not yet been banished—a heart that ached with a keen anguish as its owner watched those two figures seated in the shadow of the chestnut-tree. Mr. Jerningham had lived in society, and had learned the difficult art of conducting one argument with skill and judgment while another argument was being silently debated in his heart. He talked about Islamism, and did battle for his own convictions, and missed no chance of putting his opponent in the wrong; and yet all the time the inner voice was debating that other question.

"If I had been as free as this young man, could I have won that girl, with him for my rival?" he asked himself. "What gift has he that I do not possess—except youth? And is there really a charm in youth more divine than any grace of mind or polish of manner that belongs to a riper age? Is it only a physical charm—the charm of a smoother cheek or brighter eyes—or is it an indefinable freshness of mind and heart that constitutes the superiority? I do not think Helen de Bergerac the kind of woman to like a man less because there are a few lines across his forehead and a few silver threads in his hair; but I know that there is a sympathy between her and this young man that does not exist between her and me. And yet I doubt if any ambitious youth of five-and-twenty can love as devotedly as a man of my age. It is only when he has proved the hollowness of everything else in life that a man is free to surrender himself entirely to the woman he loves."

Again and again during the six months of his lingering at Greenlands, Mr. Jerningham had told himself that his case would have been utterly hopeless, even if he had been free to woo his old friend's daughter. And yet he pined for his freedom; and there were times when he felt somewhat unkindly disposed towards the harmless lady at Hampton.

"What are we to each other but an incumbrance?" he asked himself.

"If she had been more guilty, we might be free; she to marry Desmond, and I——"

And then Mr. Jerningham reflected upon the Continental manner of marrying and giving in marriage. If he had been at liberty to ask for Helen's hand, what more likely than that the priceless boon would have been granted by the friend who loved him and believed in him? Theodore de Bergerac was of all men the most likely to bestow his daughter on a husband of mature age, since he himself had married a woman twenty years his junior, and had found perfect happiness in that union.

Mr. Jerningham fancied himself blessed with this fair young wife, and pictured to himself the calm and blameless existence which he might have led with so sweet a companion. Oh, what a tranquil haven would this have been, after the storms he had tempted, the lightnings he had invited and defied!

"Of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes," said the Divine Teacher. Mr. Jerningham remembered that solemn sentence. There are some precepts of Holy Writ that a man cannot put out of his memory, though he may have outlived by a quarter of a century his faith in the creed they teach.

"I suppose I had my chance of perfect happiness at some moment of my life, and forfeited it," he said to himself. "Destiny is a bitter schoolmistress, and has no pity on the mistakes of her scholars."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"L'OISEAU FUIT COMME LE BONHEUR."

EUSTACE refrained from opening the parcel given to him by his uncle until he found himself in his own room, in the solemn quiet of a rural midnight. Then, and then only, did he feel himself at liberty to enter upon a task which had a certain sanctity. It was but a mixed record of truth and fiction, this book which his guilty father had given to the world; but some part of his mother's life was interwoven with those pages; her brief dream of happiness was shut, as it were, between the leaves of the volumes, like flowers that have once been bright with colour and rich with perfume, and which one finds pale and scentless in a long-unopened book.

The book was called *The Disappointments of Dion: a Sequel to Dion, a Confession.* By the same Author. This preservation in the second book of the name that had figured in the first seemed to indicate the autobiographical nature of both works. The hero of the *Disappointments* was the same being as the hero of the *Confession*—the same being, hardened and degraded by ten years of selfishness and dissipation. The Dion of the *Confession* had the affectation of cynicism, the tone of an Alcibiades who apes the philosophy of Diogenes. The Dion of the *Disappointments* was really cynical, and attempted to disguise his cynicism under an affectation of *bonhomie.*

Eustace sat till late into the night, reading—with unspeakable pain, with sorrow, anger, sympathy, mixed in his mind as he read. Yes, this book had been written by his father—there could be no doubt of that. The first volume contained his mother's story. It fitted into the record of the letters, and to the story told by Mrs. Willows. Idealized and poetized by the fancy of the hero, he read the history of a girl's day-dream, and recognized in this poetized heroine the woman whose pensive face had been wont to brighten when it looked upon his. The story of a young student's passion for a tradesman's daughter was told with a certain grace and poetry. It is but an old story at best. It is always more or less the legend of Faust and Gretchen, and it needs a Göthe to elevate so simple a fable from the commonplace to the sublime.

The author of *Dion* described his Gretchen very prettily. It was a portrait by Greuse, with an occasional touch of Raphael.

To the study of this book Eustace Thorburn applied himself with intense earnestness of thought and purpose. The Sibylline volumes were not more precious to the sage who purchased them so dearly than was this egotistical composition to the man who had found a leaf from his mother's life in the heart of the book.

How much written here was the plain, unvarnished truth? how much the mere exercise of a romantic fancy? That was the question upon which depended the whole value of the volumes.

On the one hand, it would seem scarcely likely that any man would publish to the world the story of his own wrong-doing, or anatomize his own heart for the pleasure of a novel-reading public. On the other hand, there was the fact that men have, in a perverted spirit of vanity, given to the press revelations of viler sins and more deliberate baseness than any transgression confessed by the author of *Dion.* Eustace remembered the Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau; and he told himself that there is no crime which the egotist does not think interesting when the criminal is himself. But the strongest evidence in support of the idea that this *Disappointments of Dion* was throughout a narration of real events lay in the fact that those

pages which described the author's courtship of a tradesman's daughter formed an exact transcript of his mother's story, as Eustace had learned it. The quiet sea-coast town, gayer in those days than now; the bookseller's shop; the stretch of yellow sand beyond the rocks; the dull, commonplace companion of the author's "divine C."; the time of year; the interval that elapsed between the brief courtship and the elopement—all corresponded exactly with the data of that sad history whose every detail was written upon Eustace Thorburn's heart.

Throughout the book, places and persons were indicated only by initials; and this alone imparted somewhat of an obsolete and Minerva-Press appearance to the volumes. This circumstance also gave further ground for the idea that there was in this book very little of absolute invention.

Eustace read the two slender volumes from beginning to end at a sitting. He began to read before midnight. The broad summer sunlight shone upon him, and the birds were singing loud in the woodland, when he closed the second volume. For him every page had an all-absorbing interest. The reading of this book was like the autopsy of his father's mind and heart; and there was something of the surgeon's scientific scrutiny in the deliberate care with which he read.

If there were any good to be found in this book, he was prepared to set that good as a *per-contra* in the dread account of debtor and creditor which he kept against his unknown father. But he wanted to fathom the depths of evil in the mind of that nameless enemy. He wanted to ascertain the uttermost wrong this man had done him in the person of that dearer part of himself, his dead mother.

He read the book steadily through, pausing only to mark the passages which seemed to tell Cecil Mayfield's story, and all passages which bore, however indirectly, upon that story.

It was half-past six when he read the last page; and half-past seven was M. de Bergerac's breakfast-hour. Happily, Mr. Thorburn was at that privileged age when a man can do without sleep, and find as much refreshment in a few pails of cold water as ponderous middle age can derive from a long night's rest. So he made his toilet, and went downstairs to the bright, pretty breakfast-room, little the worse for the studious occupation of his night.

Mr. Jerningham had wandered down by the water-side after leaving the cottage, and had seen the light in the secretary's window, and wondered what the young man was doing.

"In the throes of poetical composition, no doubt," thought the master of Greenlands. "How pleased he seemed to come back to these people; and with what a smile *she* welcomed him! And to think that if I were to offer every possession I have in

this world, and my heart of hearts, and my pride, and my life into the bargain, I could not buy one such smile as that! I could have such smiles once for the asking; they shone upon me from the fairest faces, spontaneous and liberal as the sunlight; and I passed on, and did not cherish one of them to light my old age. Oh, surely there is some world in which we live our lives again, enlightened by the follies of the past; some Swedenborgian heaven, in which the shadows of the things we love here are presented to us, and we move amongst them regenerate and spiritualized, and redeem the mistakes and errors of our earthly existence!"

Helen de Bergerac came in from the garden with an apronful of flowers, as Eustace Thorburn entered the breakfast-room. And then came the arrangement of the flowers in old Wedgwood vases and old Worcester bowls, the clipping of stems, the plucking of stray leaves, the selections of dewy roses and jasmine, honey-suckle and geranium,—the most dangerous of all occupations for two people who would fain hide that secret which these two were trying to conceal from each other.

These two, however, behaved with supreme discretion. There was a dull pain in the heart of Eustace which made him more silent than usual. He could not ask the playful, frivolous questions, about garden and poultry-yard, aviary and greenhouse, Greek verbs or Latin verse-making, the asking of which until now had been such an unfailing source of delight.

The long night-watching had saddened him; the brooding over his mother's history had brought the sense of the irremovable stigma upon his name home to his mind with a new bitterness.

"Would this girl's father, with his Spanish pride of race and his pedigree of half a dozen centuries, ever bring himself to excuse that one shortcoming upon my part?" he asked himself. "If in all other respects I were the very suitor he would choose for his only child, could he forgive the bar-sinister which makes my shield unworthy to go side by side with his?"

And then the young poet remembered his poverty, and laughed at himself in very bitterness of heart for the folly which had permitted him to believe, even for one delusive moment, that Theodore de Bergerac would accept him for a son-in-law.

"Uncle Dan sees these things clearly," he said to himself. "He has told me my duty, and I will do it."

Helen saw the cloud upon his face, and wondered what could have changed him so suddenly. Only last night he had seemed so gay, so happy. This morning he was silent and thoughtful; and something told her that his thoughts were sad.

"I fear you heard some unpleasant news while you were in town," she said, anxiously; "and yet last night you seemed so light-hearted."

"Light-headed, perhaps! There is a kind of intoxication in pleasant talk about the things one loves and believes in; and last night the very air was intoxicating. The faint new moon, and the flowers, and the river,—those things mount to one's brain. The morning is sacred to common-sense. Hope, faith, happiness, what are they but phantoms that vanish at cock-crow? Daylight ushers in the reign of worldly wisdom, and her rule is apt to seem hard."

"Does she seem such a hard mistress to you, Mr. Thorburn?"

"Yes; she shows me cruel truths in a cold, pitiless way."

Helen looked puzzled. She felt that the conversation was in some manner dangerous, and did not know whither any further question might drift her. So she wisely desisted from questioning, and fell back upon such safe subjects as the flowers and the birds. But every now and then she gave a little furtive look at Eustace Thorburn's grave face; and those furtive glances convinced her that he was unhappy.

M. de Bergerac came from his library before the arrangement of the vases was quite concluded. He was the earliest riser in his household, and came to the breakfast-table always refreshed and invigorated by upwards of an hour's hard reading.

"I have been looking over your note-books, Thorburn," he said; "you have done wonders—those extracts from the old Venetian manuscripts will be invaluable to me. You must have worked very closely during your absence."

"I did stick to my desk at the Museum pretty closely. But I am more than repaid if my extracts are likely to be useful."

"They are of the most precious kind. Where should I get such another secretary? You will be able to finish my book some day."

"Papa!" cried Helen, tenderly.

"Do not look at me so sadly, dear child! If I were to live to the age of Old Parr, the book would scarcely be finished. Thou knowest not how such a subject grows upon the writer—how he sees worlds on worlds opening before his dazzled eyes—ever distant, ever new—widening into infinity. Everywhere it is the wealth of man's imagination which astounds, which terrifies him; and he asks himself with shame and humiliation, of the most profound, is it *this* which I have set myself to catalogue? Is it *this* that I think can be numbered and summarized in my short span? In the traditions of the Rabbins what a universe! In the faith of Zoroaster, what worlds unexplored—unexplorable! What fond fantastic dreams, what sublime depths of thought, what grandeur of faith, in the pious mysteries of Brahma and Buddha! Every race peoples invisible worlds; and in each new voyage into the realms of untutored fancy the shadow world stretches wider before our gaze.

Gods and demons, angels of good and of evil, assume shapes more gigantic, attributes more awful. Hell sinks to depths unfathomable. Heaven recedes from the weak grasp of mortal intellect. Stricken, distraught, the weak soul flees aghast before those barbaric wonders, and takes refuge in the haven of Christian faith. Ah, how simple, how beautiful, after the gigantic demonology of the East, seems the pure and perfect Redeemer of the West—beginning with the martyrdom of the magnanimous Prometheus, the bondage of the mythic Herakles, culminating in the Atonement of the Divine Christ!"

And here M. de Bergerac dilated upon one of his favourite theories, the dual gospel of Western Paganism and Christianity; and fought with Eustace Thorburn in support of his pet hypothesis, to the effect that Grecian fable was only a distortion of Bible-history, and the stories of Prometheus and Herakles mere rude foreshadowings of the purer and holier story of man's Redeemer.

They fought out the battle of comparative mythology; Eustace was of the two the more earnest Christian. M. de Bergerac went every Sunday to a pretty little Roman Catholic chapel, half hidden in a rustic garden, beyond Windsor; but his faith would scarcely have satisfied the requirements of an orthodox director. The younger man had passed dryshod through the boundless ocean of mythic lore to that haven of which his patron had spoken—that harbour of rest for the wandering soul, where passionate desire to solve the great enigma is exchanged for the simple faith of childhood. From his mother's lips Eustace had learned that tender religion of the heart which Paganism tries in vain to match with the hard logic of a Plato, or the moral axioms of a Confucius. To this faith he had clung even more fondly since his mother's death. If not for his own sake, for hers he must needs have been a believer. Where else could he find hope and comfort in the thought of her sad pilgrimage? Here her weak feet had travelled by hard and crooked ways—here the burden laid on her had been cruel and heavy. As an earthly destiny, with no hope of compensation beyond the regions of earth, Celia's life would have seemed all bitterness—the vengeance decreed by a pitiless Nemesis, rather than the chastisement of a merciful God. But if beyond the sad end of that sorrowful journey the traveller found rest and forgiveness in regions unimaginable to the earth-burdened spirit, the pilgrimage seemed no longer hard, the burden no longer heavy; the enigma of all earthly sorrows received its answer.

This was the hope dear to the heart of Celia Mayfield's son; and for this faith he fought sturdily in conversational battles with his patron, refusing to yield one inch of that ground on which the divinity of his Master's mission rested. He would

accept for that pure Teacher no first-cousinship with Buddha or Confucius—no misty resemblance to Zagreus or Dionysus, Prometheus or Herakles—no intellectual relationship with Zoroaster or Mahomet. For the truth and the whole truth of the gospel which he had read at his mother's knee, he was resolute and unflinching.

If he had been the most jesuitical of schemers, he could not have better forwarded his cause with Helen de Bergerac than by his championship of the true faith. She too had learned her best and earliest lessons from a mother's lips, and the philosophical breadth of view presented to her always in her father's conversation had in nowise spoiled the simplicity of those first lessons. She heard her father's rationalistic talk with unchanging regret; and hoped always for the day in which he should come to see these things in the same mysterious light which made them so sacred and beautiful to her.

To-day Eustace was more than usually earnest. Was he not about to make his first great sacrifice in proof of his faith? Not on the shrine of Pagan honour was he about to lay down his happiness, but on the altar of Christian duty.

He determined that there should be little time lost in the completion of that bitter sacrifice. The knife should be sharpened at once for the slaughter of Isaac. And in this case, there was, alas! no hope of Divine interposition.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF DION."

THE secretary went out into the park, and down to the neglected shrubbery-walk that wound along the river bank. This was the loneliest and wildest part of Mr. Jerningham's domain, and solitude was what Eustace Thorburn wanted to-day. He had brought with him, not his own poem, but those two slender volumes which contained the history of his mother's youth, and in the composition whereof he beheld the hand of his unknown father. He wanted to read this book a second time, even more slowly and thoughtfully than he had read it the first time. He wanted, if it were possible, to plumb the very depths of his father's heart.

The still summer day and the woodland solitude were well fitted for meditation. Eustace walked about a mile and a half from M. de Bergerac's cottage before he opened his book. The seat which he chose was a rude rustic bench, in a hollow of the bank, close to the edge of the river—a seat which at high tide was half covered by the water. The rugged sloping bank rose behind the rough wooden bench. The young man leaned lazily against the short burnt grass of the bank as he read.

The portion of the book most interesting to this one reader was that which told, in terms half cynical, half playful, of the writer's brief delusion—the little Arcadian comedy of rustic life with the girl whose heart he had broken, and the bitter tragedy in which it ended.

The scene depicted in this portion of the story was wild and mountainous; snow-crowned hills formed the background of the landscape. The sea was close at hand; all was gigantic, rugged, uncivilized. Yet there was no mention of foreign customs or foreign people. There was a certain familiarity in everything, that was scarcely compatible with the idea that this rustic dwelling-place of Dion's was remote from England; and Eustace decided that the scene of the story must have lain within the British dominions. The description of the landscape might apply to many spots in Scotland, in Wales, or even in Ireland. Clue to the exact locality there seemed, on first consideration, none; so faint were the indications, so general the features of the scene. The record had been evidently written long after the occurrences described. Only the cold light of memory illumined the pages; after-disappointments had embittered the spirit of the writer, and lent bitterness even to memory. It was, in very truth, the confession of a man infinitely worse than the author of *Dion*.

The following were the pages which told Eustace how rudely his mother's brief dream had been broken:—

"I think we had scarcely been a month at H. H. before I began to discover how profound was my mistake. Tenderness and affection, a fond admiration of my mental attributes that approached idolatry—these my poor C. gave me in liberal measure. But the higher tribute of self-abnegation she could not give me. Hers was one of those natures which are not made for sacrifice. The grandeur of heroic souls was wanting in this gentle breast. In the haven of a domestic circle, safely sheltered from the storms of fate, to a man whose days were occupied in that hard struggle for life which the world calls business, and who asked of the gods nothing brighter than a household angel, this dear girl would have seemed the sweetest of wives. I think of her always with supreme tenderness; but I cannot forget the weariness that crept upon me when I found how little sympathy there was between us.

"From all loud reproaches, even from the appearance of grief, she for a long time refrained. But I could see that she was not happy; and this fact was in itself a torture to a man of sensitive nature and irritable nerves. A look, a half-stifled sigh, ever and anon told me that I had not found a companion, but a victim. The smile whose angelic sweetness had charmed me in the bookseller's ovely daughter had faded, nay, almost

vanished. It was like some mediæval legend: the supernal beauty met by the knight in the haunted darkness of an enchanted forest is transformed into a dull, earthly spouse; and the foolish knight, who had ridden home to his castle with a divinity, awakens to find himself mated to a peasant-girl.

"This was my first and most bitter disappointment. I look back now and ask myself what it was that I had hoped, and what substantial ground there had been for my hopes. Because this poor girl had a face like Guido's Beatrice Cenci, because she praised my book in her low musical voice and simple commonplace phrases, I must needs fancy that I had found the Ægeria of my dreams, the companion-spirit, the inspiring and elevating influence which every poet seeks in the object of his love!

"I used to think my own thoughts very grand in those days. There were moments in which I yearned and hungered for some sharer in my dreams. I was steeped to the lips in Shelley's poetry; I wanted to find a Cynthia,—

> 'A second self, far dearer and more fair.
> . . . . . .
> Hers too were all my thoughts: ere yet endowed
> With music and with light, their fountains flowed
> In poesy; and her still, earnest face,
> Pallid with feelings which intensely glowed
> Within, was turned on mine with speechless grace
> Watching the hopes which there her heart had learned to trace.
>
> In me, communion with this purest being
> Kindled intenser zeal, and made me wise
> In knowledge, which in hers mine own mind seeing,
> Left in the human world few mysteries:
> How without fear of evil or disguise
> Was Cynthia! What a spirit, strong and mild,
> Which death, or pain, or peril could despise,
> Yet melt in tenderness!'

This was the bright ideal of my dream; and instead of this, what had I found? A gentle girl, whose education had scarcely outstepped the boundary-line of the all-abridging Pinnock, and who consumed hours in secret weeping because she had offended her father, a small trader in a small country town, and had forfeited her social position in that miserably narrow world which was the beginning and end of her universe. Alas for my fond delusions! Where was the

> 'spirit strong and mild,
> Which death or pain, or peril could despise?'

"There were, indeed, moments in which some pretty poetical thought slipped between my poor girl's 'scarlet-threaded lips;' but she was too timid by nature to give voice to her brightest

fancies, and I saw noble thoughts in her deep eyes which her lips never learned to translate. Sometimes, in the solemn stillness of a moonlight night, when we had wandered along some rugged mountain-path, and reached a spot whence we could look down upon the pathless waste of waters, which of all spectacles in Nature's great theatre most affected this untaught girl, I could see that her mind took a kind of inspiration from the grandeur of the scene, and that the littleness of self was for the moment put away from her. Are there not, indeed, brief pauses of mental intoxication, in which the spirit releases itself from its dull mortal bondage, and floats starward on the wings of inspiration?

"'If we could stay here for ever,' she said to me one night, when we sat in the little classic temple on D. P., looking down from that craggy headland upon the barren sea; 'if this light could shine always, with those deep, solemn shadows sleeping under the shelter of the rocks, I think that one might forget all that is hardest in the world. Here I remember nothing except that you and I are together in the moonlight. Past, present, and future seem to melt into this hour. I can almost fancy the rocks and the waves feeling a sort of happiness like this—a sense of delight when the moon shines upon them. It is difficult to think that the waves feel *nothing* when they come creeping along the sands with that half-stealthy, half-joyous motion, like the nymphs you talk of, dancing in secret, afraid to awaken the sea-god.'

"'If you had lived in the days when there were gods upon the earth, C., I think you would have fallen in love with Poseidon.'

"She was looking out across the sea, with a dreamy light in her eyes, and her lips half parted, as if she had indeed seen a band of snowy-kirtled nymphs dancing on the broad stretch of sand in the shadow of the headland.

"'Poss—who?' she asked, wonderingly.

"'Poseidon; one of the elder sons of Time and the Great Mother, the sea-god of whom you spoke just now. I think if you had lived in the Golden Age, you would have met with Tyro's lover, and loved him, as she did. I never saw such a passionate fondness for the sea as you betray in every look and word.'

"'Yes,' she said; 'I have always loved the sea with a feeling that I have been unable to express, as if there were indeed a human heart in all that wide ocean. When I am—when you have been away longer than usual, and I feel lonely, I come here, and sit for hours watching the waves roll slowly in, and thinking.'

"And here her voice trembled a little, and I knew that the thoughts of which she spoke were gloomy ones. Thus it was with us ever. For a moment she seemed a companion, a kindred spirit; but in the next we were back again in the old wearisome channel, and I felt myself stifled by the atmosphere of B.

"Her utter want of education made a gulf between us which

even love could not span. The fact that she was intelligent, appreciative, was not sufficent to render companionship possible between us. Those regions which for me were densely peopled with bright and wondrous images were for her blank and empty as the desert plains of Central Africa. Pretty poetical fancies —the wild flowers of the intellectual world—took quick root in her shallow mind; but the basis for deep thoughts was wanting. I grew weary of conversation in which my part was almost a monologue, weary of long *tete-à-têtes* which left me no richer by one wise thought or amusing paradox. Day by day I fell back more completely upon my books for company. The poor child perceived this with evident distress. One day she asked me with tones and looks most piteous, why I no longer talked to her, as I had once talked, about the books I was reading, the subjects that I had chosen for future poetic treatment. I told her frankly that it was tiresome to me to talk to her of things with which she had evidently no sympathy.

"'Indeed,' she cried, 'you are mistaken. I sympathize with all your thoughts. I can picture to myself all your fancies. The worlds which you tell me of, and the people—the strange wild worship of those people—I can fancy them and see them. They are a little dim and shadowy to me; but I *do* see them. And I so dearly love to hear you talk. I cannot discuss these things with you as a clever person would, and I cannot tell you half I think and feel about them; but to sit by you as you read or write, to watch you till you grow tired of your books, and look up and talk to me, is perfect happiness for me—my only happiness now.'

"Here her voice grew tremulous, and she broke down in the usual hopeless manner.

"'If you would only teach me to understand the things that interest you, if you would let me read your books, I should be a fitter companion for you,' she said, presently.

"I groaned aloud at the hopelessness of this idea. I was to teach this poor child to be my second self, to train her into sympathy—to grow my own Cynthia! I envied Shelley his happier fate, and that bright spirit which

'Walked as free as light the clouds among.'

But Shelley had made his mistake, and had drained the bitter cup of disappointment before he found his fair ideal.

"I know there are men who have educated their wives, but I never could understand this idea of the lover lined with the pedagogue. C. asked to read the books I was reading; *id est*, K. O. Müller, in the original German; the *Orestea*, in the original Greek; *A Course of Hindoo Tradition*, published by the Society for the Propagation of Arianism; De Barante's *Dukes of Burgundy*; and the *Old Ballads of France*, with an

occasional dip into Catullus, Juvenal, Lucretius, or Horace. These were the books which I was reading, in a very desultory, unprofitable manner; for the weakness of my life has been inconstancy, even in the matter of books. A few pages of one, a random peep between the leaves of another, a hop, skip, and a jump between Oriental legend and Platonic philosophy, finding everywhere some point of comparison, some forced resemblance. I told my poor dear C. that anything like teaching on my part would be an impossibility. However, by way of satisfying the poor child's thirst for knowledge, I sent a list of books to a London bookseller, including a few simple elementary works and my favourite English poets; and this little collection I presented to C. I found she had read all the poets, in her father's library, and was indeed as familiar with them as I myself; but she received the books from me with an appearance of real delight. This was the first present I made her. It would have been a pleasure to me to lavish costly gifts upon her; but it was a pleasure more exquisite to withhold them, and to be sure that no adventitious aid had assisted me in the winning of her love.

"I think that most wearisome institution, the honeymoon, must have been inaugurated by some sworn foe to matrimony, some vile misogamist, who took to himself a wife in order to discover, by experience, the best mode of rendering married life a martyrdom.

"Enlightened by experience, this miserable wretch said to himself, 'I will introduce a practice which, in the space of one short month, shall transform the doating bridegroom into the indifferent husband, the idolatrous lover into the submissive expiator of a fatal mistake. For one month I, by my invisible agent, Fashion, will bind together bride and bridegroom in dread imprisonment. Impalpable shall be their fetters; fair and luxurious shall be their prison; complacent and respectful shall be the valet and abiagail, the lackeys and grooms who act as their gaolers; and in that awful bondage they shall have no worse chastisement than each other's society. Chained together like the wretched convicts of Toulon, they shall pace to and fro their lonely exercise-ground, until the bright sky above and the bright earth around them shall seem alike hateful. They shall be for ever plumbing each other's souls, and for ever finding shallows; for ever gauging each other's minds, to be for ever disappointed by the result. And not till they have learned thoroughly to detest each other shall the order of release be granted, and the fiat pronounced: You know each other's emptiness of mind and shallowness of heart; go forth and begin your new existence, profoundly wretched in the knowledge that your miserable lives must be spent together.'

"I had planned and plotted this residence at H. H., hoping to

find a glimpse of Eden in this loneliness amid Nature's splendour, 'with one fair spirit for my minister.' If I had been fond of sport, I might have found amusement for my days, and might have returned at night to my nest to meet an all-sufficient welcome in my love's happy smile. But I was at this time a student, still suffering from the effects of overwork at O———, and a little from the disappointments of my career, hyper-sensitive, *tant soit peu* irritable; and C.'s companionship bored me. This was a crisis of my life, in which I needed the sustaining influence of a stronger mind than my own. Even her affection became a kind of torment. She was too anxious to please me, too painfully conscious of my slightest show of weariness, too apprehensive of losing my regard. I could almost have said with Bussy Rabutin, '*Je ne pouvais plus souffrir ma maîtresse, tant elle m'aimait.*'

"It is needless to dwell upon this story of disappointment, that was so keen as to verge upon remorse. I hated myself for my folly; I was angry with this poor girl because she could neither be happy nor render me so. If there were any breach of honour involved in my broken promise, I paid dearly for my dishonour. And *that* kind of promise is never intended to be believed: it is the easy excuse which a faithful knight provides for his lady-love. Let me be guilty of perjury, that you may still be perfect, he says; and the damsel accepts the chivalrous pretence.

"With this poor child, unhappily, there was no such thing as reason. Worldly wisdom, the necessities of position, the ties of family, were unknown in her vocabulary.

"'I have broken my father's heart,' she said, in that *larmoyante* tone which became almost habitual to her. And thereupon, of course, I felt myself a wretch. At this period of my life I sometimes caught myself wondering what would have become of Faust if he and Gretchen had spent six months in a rustic cottage amongst the Hartz mountains. Surely he would have languished to return to his books, to his parchments, to his crucibles and mathematical instruments, his Nostradamus, and his prosy, insufferable Wagner; anything to escape that lugubrious maiden.

"And yet what can be a prettier picture than Gretchen plucking the petals of her rose, or my poor C., as I first saw her, bending with rapt countenance over my own book? Oh, fatal book, that brought sorrow to her, weariness unspeakable to me!

"If C. had been reasonable, she could have found little cause to complain of me. I had no intention of breaking the tie so lightly made. That I was responsible for that step, which must colour the remainder of *her* existence, I never for a moment forgot. All I rebelled against was the notion that my future life was to be overshadowed by the funereal tint which her melancholy vision imparted to everything she looked upon. At

one time I conceived the idea that she was disquieted by the uncertainty of the future, and I hastened to relieve her mind upon this point.

"'My darling girl,' I said, with real earnestness, 'you cannot surely doubt that your future will be my first care. Come what may, your prosperity, your happiness indeed,—so far as mortal man can command happiness,—shall be assured. I hope you do not doubt this.'

"She looked at me with that dull despair which of late I had more than once remarked in her countenance.

"'H.,' she said, 'shall I ever be your wife?'

"I turned my face away from her in silence, wrung her poor little cold hands in my own, and left her without a word. This was a question which I could not answer, a question which she should not have asked.

"That evening, as I walked alone in the dreary solitude under the cliffs, a sudden thought flashed into my mind.

"'Good heavens,' I thought, 'how completely I have put myself into this girl's power by my folly; and what a hold she has upon me, if she knew how to use it, or were base enough to trade upon the advantages of her position!'

"Reflection told me that it was not in C. to make a mean use of power which I had so unwittingly placed in her hands. But I laughed aloud when I considered my shortsighted folly in allowing myself to drop into such a dangerous position.

"When we next met, C. was pallid as death, and I could see that she had devoted the interval to tears. I keenly felt her silent woe, and with my whole heart pitied her childish disappointment. Until this occasion I had not for a moment supposed that she cherished any hope of such folly on my part as an utter sacrifice of my liberty. It was this of which I thought, and not my position in the world. Had I been inclined for matrimony, I would as willingly have married this tradesman's daughter as a countess. It was the hateful tie, the utter abnegation of man's divinest gift of freedom, the mortgage of my future, from which I shrank with abhorrence.

"'My dear love,' I said to C., as I tried to kiss away the traces of her tears, 'I mean to love you all my life, if you will let me. And do you think I shall love you any less because I have not asked the Archbishop of Canterbury's permission to adore you?' And then I was guilty of that customary commonplace about 'a marriage in the sight of Heaven,' which has been especially invented for such occasions.

"After this I tried to indoctrinate her with the philosophy of the purest of men and most lawless of poets. I entreated her to rend custom's mortal chain,

'And walk as free as light the clouds among.

But the exalted mind which can rise superior to the bondage of custom had not been given to this poor girl. She always went back to the one inevitable argument, 'I have broken my father's heart.'

"It was quite in vain that I endeavoured to make her see the ethics of life from a nobler stand-point. Her thoughts revolved always in the same narrow circle —B——, that odious watering-place, and the humdrum set of shopkeepers whom she had known from her childhood.

"'You do not know how my father is respected in the town,' she said, piteously, when I reminded her of the insignificance of such a place as B—— when weighed against the rest of the universe, and ventured to suggest that the esteem and approbation of B—— did not constitute the greatest sacrifice ever made by woman.

"'As for the respect which these good people feel for your father, what does it amount to, my dear love?' I asked. 'A man lives in some sleepy country town twenty years or so, and pays his debts, and attends the services of his parish church with unbroken regularity, and dies in the odour of sanctity; or else suddenly throws the mental powers of his fellow-townsmen off their balance by forging a bill of exchange, or murdering his wife and children, or setting his house on fire with a view to cheating the insurance companies. What is the respect of such people worth? It is given to the man who pays his tradesmen and goes to church. He may be the veriest tyrant, or hypocrite, or fool in the universe, and they respect him all the same. He may have squared the circle, or solved the problem of perpetual motion, or invented the steam-engine, or originated the process of vaccination, and if he fails to pay his butcher and baker, and to attend his church, they will withhold their respect. Greatness of intellect, or of conduct, is utterly beyond their comprehension. They would consider Columbus a doubtful character, and Raleigh a disreputable one.'

"Upon this I saw symptoms of tears, and timeously departed. The dear child took everything *au grand sérieux*. Oh! how I languished for the graceful badinage of Kensington Gore, the careless talk of my clubs—anything rather than this too poetical loneliness.

"I planned my future that night. Some pretty rustic cottage for C. in the hilly country between Hampstead and Barnet, within an easy ride of town, where my own head-quarters must needs be when not abroad. I had fancied that C. and I could have travelled together, but I found her far too *triste* a companion for Continental wanderings. She was too ignorant to appreciate scenes which owe their best charm to association, and thus utterly unable to sympatize with the emotions which

those scenes might excite in the breast of her fellow-traveller: nor had she the animal spirits which render the ignorance of some women amusing. She was, in short, the genius of home rather than the goddess of poetry; and I resolved to establish a home over which she might preside, a haven from the storms of life, whither I might go to have oil poured into my wounds, and whence I might return to the world refreshed and comforted.

"I pictured to myself this home, as fair as taste and wealth could make it. No flowers that my hand could lavish would have been wanting to adorn this poor girl's pathway. I have no reproach to make against myself here. There are few lives happier than hers would have been, if she had been content to entrust herself to my guidance. But my liberty was a treasure which I could not bring myself to resign.

"All might, perhaps, have gone well with us but for one unlucky turn of affairs; an accident in which a fatalist would have recognized the hand of Destiny, but in which I saw only one of those foolish *contretemps* which assist the further entanglement of that tangled skein called Life.

"One day, in a sudden fit of disgust with myself, my books, my companion, and the universe, I left the house, and went on foot in search of some wandering Mephistopheles, with whom to barter my soul for a fresh sensation.

"I was five-and-twenty. My *première jeunesse*—the bloom on the peach, the down on the butterfly's wing, the fresh dews of morning, the glory of the sunshine—had been wasted. The world called me a young man—young because bitter thoughts had not yet set their mark upon my brow. They were only inscribed upon my heart. I surveyed the horizon of my life, and saw that the stars had all vanished. There was only the dull equal gray of a sunless afternoon. It is impossible to imagine a prospect more completely blank than that on which I looked. There is no pleasure known to mankind that I had not tasted, to satiety. The baser, as well as the more refined—I had tried them all. In the records of Roman dissipation Suetonius or Gibbon could suggest little—except some darker vices—which I had not tried, and found wanting. I had slept under the reticulated lilies of Antinöus, and supped upon beefsteaks and porter with the gladiators of Commodus, in the modern guise of Tom Spring and Ben Caunt. Love had been powerless to give me happiness. Friendship I had been too wise to test. My friends were the friends of the rich Timon. I did not value them so highly as to put their friendship through the crucible of pretended poverty. I took them for what they were worth; and my sole cause of complaint against them was that they failed to amuse me. My life was one long yawn—and if I still lived, it was only because I knew not what purgatory of

perpetual *ennui* might await me on Acheron's further shore. Could I have been certain of such an Inferno as Dante's—all action, passion, fever, excitement—I should gladly have exchanged the placid wretchedness of life for the stirring horrors of that dread under-world.

"On this one particular day, when most of all I felt the utter weariness of my existence, I wandered purposeless along the mountain-side—thinking of those rugged steeps of Hellas, which the scene recalled—and scarcely knew whither my footsteps took me, till I suddenly found myself in a scene that was very familiar, and on a spot which, though not by any means remote from my own eyrie, I had hitherto avoided.

"I was on the landward slope of the mountain; below me lay a lake, and between my stand-point and the water rose curling wreaths of blue smoke from the chimneys of a house which I knew very well.

"It was the hunting-lodge of E. T., a man who was, if not my friend, at least one of my oldest acquaintances; a man between whom and myself there reigned that easy-going familiarity which passes current for friendship. We had been partners at whist, had been in love with the same women, *de par le haut monde* and *de par le bas monde*. We had bought horses of each other; had cheated each other, more or less unconsciously, in such dealing; had helped each other to break the bank at a Palais-Royal gaming-table; had been concerned together in an opera-ball riot one Easter with the D. of H. and certain Parisian notabilities of the Boulevard du Gand. If this be not friendship, I know not what is.

"The sight of those blue wreaths of smoke; the remembrance of the riot in the Rue Lepelletier; the little suppers at the Rocher and the Trois Frères; the wit, the wine, the fever of the blood that for the time being is almost happiness—stirred my senses with a faint thrill of pleasure.

"'If T. is there, I will ask him to dine with me,' I thought; 'C. must accustom herself to receive my friends, or to let me receive them without her. I am suffering from the Londoner's nostalgie; I languish for the air of the club-houses and the Ring. It will be something to hear the newest scandals, fresh from the lips of E. T., who is a notorious gossip and *mauvais diseur*.'

"I had some reason for concluding that T. was stopping at his place. The smoke gave evidence that the house was inhabited, and I knew that in his absence the place was generally shut up, and left in the charge of a shepherd, who lived in a wretched shanty further down the valley. My friend's finances were as slender as his lineage was noble. He claimed a direct descent from the Plantagenets, and was never out of the hands of the Jews.

"'They are taking it out of me on account of that nasty

knack of my ancestors, who raised money by the extraction of the teeth of Israel,' he said. 'But we have changed all that. Isaac of York has the best of it now-a-days, and draws the teeth of the Giaour!'

"I turned aside from the narrow path skirting the mountain, and walked down the slope towards E. T.'s *pied-à-terre*. I was absurdly pleased at the idea of seeing a man whose character I thoroughly despised, and whose death I should have heard of without so much as a passing regret.

"In my utter weariness of myself and my own thoughts, I cared not in what cloaca I found a harbour of refuge. The gate of the small domain swung loosely on its hinges. I pushed it open, and walked across the small lawn, bordered by shrubberies of fir and laurel. As I neared the porch, I saw the red glow of a fire shining in one of the lower windows, and was welcomed by a yapping chorus of lap-dogs, whose bark sounded shrill through the open door. There was no need for ceremony in this wild region; and even if I had wished to stand upon punctilio, there was neither bell nor knocker whereby I might have demanded admittance. I walked straight into the hall, or lobby—the former title is too grandiose for so small a chamber—and was immediately struck by the change which had come over the scene since I had looked upon it some twelve months before.

"It was then a rude chaos of gunnery, fishing-tackle, single-sticks, fencers' masks, boxing-gloves, plastrons, pipes, great-coats, leather gaiters, fishing-boots, mackintoshes, and horse-cloths; nauseous with the odour of stale tobacco, and dangerous by the occupation of savage dogs. It was now dainty as a lady's boudoir: the floor bright with scarlet sheepskins, the walls gay with French prints. A velvet curtain half-shrouded the door of my friend's dining-room, just revealing a peep of the bright picture within—a table spread for luncheon, with snowy linen and sparkling glass. Half a dozen little yapping dogs issued from this room, and assailed me with shrill rancour. Not such specimens of the canine race had I before beheld in this mountain retreat. My friend T. ever affected the biggest and roughest of the species. Lancashire-bred mastiffs, Danish wolf-hounds—the very Titans of the canine race from Mount St. Bernard or Newfoundland. These little creatures were the apoplectic descendants of that royal race which was cradled on the knees of Castlemain and Portsmouth, swaddled in the purple of Charles. Among these appeared a couple of russet-coated pugs, with negro features, swart visages, and short bandy legs.

"Amidst the clamour of these creatures my entrance was unheard. I stooped down to examine the brutes, and was amused

to perceive that the collar of one of the spaniels was the daintiest toy of filigree gold and mosaic.

"'Has my friend turned *petit maître?*' I asked myself.

"A second glance showed me a name upon the collar—Carlitz.

"Carlitz! Hast thou not read, oh! gentle reader, Eastern stories that tell how, by a magician's wand, a fairy palace has risen suddenly in the midst of the barren desert, with birds singing, and fountains dancing in the sunlight; and among the fountains, and flowers, and birds, and barbarously-splendid colonnades, tripping across the tesselated floors, there comes something more beautiful than tropical bird or flower?

"The princess of the fairy tale—the Orient personified, with all its languid loveliness, its intoxicating sweetness, its colour and music, and sunshine and perfume—melted into one divine human creature.

"This is what the name upon the dog's collar did for me. It was the arch-enchanter's wand, evoking a goddess, in that bleak valley where I had hoped only to find a commonplace acquaintance.

"Carlitz! Shall I try to describe her—to describe the indescribable? Thou knowest her, kind reader; on thee, too, has she shone; for not to have seen her is to be a slave so dull that I would not think this book should fall into such unworthy hands. I will say of her what Lysippus said of Athens:

> "'Hast not seen Carlitz, then thou art a log;
> Hast seen and not been charmed, thou art an ass.'

Or if, by reason of absence in far-distant lands, thou hast not seen her, picture to thyself the fairest princess of thy childish fairy lore, place her on a mortal stage, the cynosure of a thousand eyes, the idol of innumerable hearts, the topic of incalculable tongues, the gossip of uncountable newspapers, or, in one word—THE FASHION; endow her with a voice of the rarest power and richness: gift her with smiles that bewitch the fancy and accents that enthrall the soul; surround her with all the loveliest objects art ever devised or taste selected—and thou hast some faint image of that supernal being whom men call Carlitz.

"She lives still—still walks 'a form of life and light,' which, seen, becomes 'a part of sight;' but the first glory of her loveliness has departed—the rich, ripe voice has lost some touch of its old music. She is still Carlitz, and to say this is to say that she is fairer than all the rest of womankind; but she is no longer the Carlitz of those days when Plancus was consul, and the Bonbonnière Opera House was in its glory."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM.

"I DREW aside the *portière* and looked into the room. She was there—Carlitz—nestling in a deep easy chair, with that perfect arm—whose rounded line was accentuated by the tight-fitting sleeve of her violet silk dress—flung above her head in an attitude expressive of weariness. She was not alone. In a chair almost as comfortable as her own sat a portly gentleman of middle age, upon whose handsome countenance good-nature had set a stamp unmistakeable even by the shallowest observer. This gentleman was happily no stranger to me. I had met him in London, and knew him as the guide, philosopher, friend, and financial agent of Madame Carlitz; at once the Talleyrand and the Fould of that fair despot.

"The divinity arched her eyebrows in lazy surprise as I crossed the threshold.

'I really believe it is some one we know, H.,' she said to her friend, with delightful insolence.

"Mr. H. received me with more cordiality. I had seen a good deal of him in London during the previous season. E. T. and he were sworn allies. H. had been lieutenant in a regiment of the Line, and, after wasting a small patrimony, had sold his commission and turned stage-player. His intimates called him Captain H. and Gentleman H., and he was a man who, in the whole of his careless career, had neither lost a friend nor made an enemy. To Madame Carlitz he was invaluable. The divinity had of late years taken it into her splendid mind to set up a temple of her own, whereby the little Sheppard's Alley Theatre, the most battered old wooden box that ever held a metropolitan audience, had been transformed, at the cost of some thousands, into a fairy temple of cream-coloured panelling, and white-satin hangings, powdered with golden butterflies; and was now known to the fashionable world, whose carriages and cabs blocked Sheppard's Alley and overflowed into Wild's Corner, as the Royal Bonbonnière Opera House.

"Here Carlitz had sung and acted in delicious little operettas, imported from her native shores, to the delight of the world in general—always excepting those stupid people, the builders, and decorators, and upholsterers who had effected the transformation that made Sheppard's Alley and Wild's Corner the haunt of rank and fashion, and who had not received any pecuniary reward for their labours. To keep these people at bay, or, it is possible, to reduce their claims to something like reason, Madame Carlitz employed my friend H., who of all men was best adapted to pour oil upon the stormy ocean of a creditor's mind. He was the en-

chantress's *alter ego*, opening and sifting her letters, arranging her starring engagements, choosing her pieces, managing her theatre, and receiving, with imperturbable temper, the torrents of her wrath when she was pleased to be angry. Nor were the proprieties outraged by an alliance so pure. H. was one of those men who are by nature fatherly—nay, almost motherly—in their treatment of women. No scandal had ever tarnished his familiar name. He had that tender, half-quixotic gallantry which is never allied with vice. He was the idol of old women and children, the pride of a doting mother, and the sovereign lord of a commonplace little woman whom he had taken for his wife.

"It was to this gentleman that I owed my right to approach Madame Carlitz. E. T. had obtained my admission to the side-scenes of the Bonbonnière, and had induced H. to present me to the lovely manageress, who was unapproachable as royalty. My introduction obtained for me only some ten minutes' converse with the presiding genius of the temple; but so supreme an honour was even this small privilege, that E. T. hastened to borrow a couple of hundred from me while my gratitude was yet warm.

"It will be seen, therefore, that I had little justification for intruding on the lady now, beyond the loneliness of the country in which I found her, and the primitive habits there obtaining.

"After I had been a second time presented by H.—the lady having quite forgotten my presentation in Sheppard's Alley—Madame received me with more warmth than she had deigned to evince for me in the green-room of the Bonbonnière.

"'These hills are so dreadfully dreary, and we are so glad to see any one who can give us news,' she said, with agreeable candour.

"And then H. explained how it fell out that I met them there. Madame had been knocked-up with the season—six new operattas, the lovely *prima donna* singing in two pieces every night, and *never* disappointing her public, which master this fair Carlitz served faithfully and constantly throughout her career—and the doctors had ordered change of scene and quiet—no Switzerland, no Italy, no German spa, but a sheltered hermitage, far from the busy haunts of men and the halting-places of stage-coaches.

"On hearing this E. T. had offered his mountain-shanty—poor accommodation, but scenery and air unmatchable in any other spot of earth. Madame Carlitz had been enraptured by the idea. E. T.'s hut was the place of places. She felt herself refreshed and invigorated by the very thought of the mountains and the sea. She would wait for no preparations, no fuss. She would take her own maid and a couple of women for the house—servants in those mountain-districts must be such bar-

barous creatures—and Parker, her butler, and a page or so, and a dozen or two trunks, and her favourite dogs, and her own particular phaeton and ponies, and her piano, and nothing more. Mr. and Mrs. H. must, of course, go with her, to keep house, and to write to people in London, and prevent the possibility of her being pursued by bills and tiresome letters, and so on.

"H. consented to this, and arranged the journey with infinite patience and good-humour, suppressing the unnecessary adjuncts of the convoy, and reducing the luggage to limits that were almost within the bounds of reason. All this he told me, as we strolled on the lawn before dinner.

"'She—well, she very nearly swore at me when I told her she mustn't bring her piano,' said Mr. H.; 'a concert grand, you know, about seven feet long. And then she stood out for bringing her man Parker, the greatest thief and scoundrel in Christendom; and the ponies and a groom, who sits behind her when she drives; but I fought my ground inch by inch, sir, and here we are. Madame has her own maid, and her lap-dogs; I have hired a stout country-girl for the kitchen, and we do the rest of the housework ourselves. And, egad, Madame likes it. She dusts and arranges the rooms, and so forth, with her own hands, and sings and dances about the house more deliciously than ever she sang or danced on the boards of the Bonbonnière. She has developed a genius for cooking: puts on a big holland apron, and tosses an omelet, or fries a dish of trout, with the art of a Vatel, and the grace of a Hebe. I never knew half her fascination until we came here; and I think, if her London admirers could see her, they would be more madly in love with her than ever.'

"They invited me to dine. Mrs. H. made her appearance before dinner—a most amiable inanity, fat, fair, and thirty, with innocent flaxen curls, blue ribbons in her cap, and a babyfied, simpering face; the sort of woman whose presence at a dinner-table, or in a drawing-room, one can only remember by perpetual mental effort. Happily she did not demand much attention, but was content to sit still and simper at her husband's jokes and Madame's 'agreeable rattle.'

"We talked of everything and everybody. The divine Carlitz, who in her audience-chamber at the Bonbonnière had received me with such chilling courtesy, was now cordial and familiar as friendship itself. Our conversation developed innumerable points of sympathy between us: mutual likings, mutual antipathies—all of the most frivolous kind; for the world of Estelle Carlitz was a world of trifles—a universe of cashmere-shawls, pug-dogs, airy ballads, dainty pony carriages, diamonds, and strawberries and cream. I have since heard that beneath that snowy breast, whereon bright gems seemed to shine with intenser brightness,

there beat a heart full of generous pity for her own sex, though hard as adamant for ours.

"To me, upon this particular evening, in this lonely mountain retreat, she was delightful. The dinner was excellent—simplicity itself, but served with a rustic grace which might have charmed Savarin or Alvanly. In my own eyrie the *cuisine* had been a lamentable failure; and the fact that it was so, may have somewhat contributed to the causes of that ever-increasing weariness of spirit which had been my portion in these mountain regions. At five-and-twenty a man can endure a good deal in this way. I was no *gourmet*, though I had lived amongst men who, in the old Roman days would have known by the flavour of their oysters whether they had been brought from the coasts of barbarous Britain—men who discussed the *ménu* of a dinner with a solemnity that would have sufficed for the forming of a Cabinet, and arranged the importation of a truffled turkey or a Strasburg pie with as much care as might have attended the dismissal of a secret emissary to the Jacobite court at Rome in the days of the first two Georges.

"H. dozed after dinner, worn out by a long morning's fishing; while Madame Carlitz and I trifled with our modest dessert, and slandered our London acquaintance. Between us we seemed to know every one. The lady's knowledge of the great world was chiefly secondhand, it must be confessed, but she told me many facts relating to my intimate acquaintance that were quite new to me, and which might have made my hair stand on end, had I not, happily, outlived that period in which the secret records of our friends' lives have power either to shock or to astonish.

"Nothing could present a more piquant contrast to my poor C.'s plaintive looks and tones, and ill-concealed unhappiness, than the elegant vivacity of this most fascinating Carlitz. And to have found her thus remote from her usual surroundings, sequestered, unexpected, as mountain sylph, lent a positive enchantment to the whole affair.

"We went out on to the lawn in the tender moonlight, while Mrs. H. made tea for us at a pretty lamp-lit table, and that most amiable and inconsiderately-considerate H. slept on serenely in his comfortable chintz-covered easy-chair. We went out into that divine, intoxicating light. The ripple of the waves sounded softly afar. A deep cleft in the mountain revealed a glimpse of moonlit water, and around and about us fell the shadows of the mighty hills.

"'It is like a scene in an opera,' cried Madame Carlitz.

"And it was evident the set awakened no higher emotion in her mind.

"'If such a set were only manageable at the Bonbonnière! But we have not enough depth for this kind of thing. That is what we want, you see—depth.'

"'Yes,' I answered, almost sadly; 'that is what we want—depth.'

"'The moonlight effect is only a question of green gauzes, and lamps at the wing. I think, by the bye, we make our moonlights a little too green. I wonder whether Mr. Fresko has ever *seen* the moon. He spends all his evenings in the theatre, smoking and drinking beer in his painting-room, or hanging about the side-scenes, smelling intolerably of stale tobacco. I really doubt if he has ever seen this kind of thing. But I can't afford to change him for a better painter. His interiors are exquisite. He was painting a tapestried drawing-room, after Boucher, when I left London—a scene that will enchant you next season. The draperies are to be blue watered-silk—real silk, you know; and folding-doors at the back will open into a garden of real exotics, if I can get my florist to supply them; but he is rather an impracticable sort of person, who is always wanting sums on account.'

"'And the piece?' I asked.

"'Oh, the piece is a pretty-enough little trifle,' the lady replied, with supreme carelessness; '*The Marquis of Yesterday*, a vaudeville of the Pompadour period, adapted from Scribe. Of course I am to play Pompadour.'

"On this I would fain have become more sentimental. The mountain light, the deep mysterious shadows, the glimpse of ocean—all invited to that dreamy sentimentality which is of earth's transient intoxications the most delightful. But Madame Carlitz was not sentimentally inclined. To shine, to astonish, to enchant—these to her were but too easy. The melting mood was out of her line. And though she fooled me by her charming air of sympathy, I felt, even in the hour of my delusion, a vague sense that it was all stage-play, and that the looks and tones which thrilled my senses, and almost touched that finer sense I had been taught to call my soul, were the same looks and tones which the dramatic critics praised in the finished actress of the Bonbonnière.

"Have I any right to be angry with her if she was all falsehood, when there was so little reality in my own *fade* sentimentality and hackneyed flatteries? No; I am not angry. I encountered the enchantress but a few nights ago in society, and said to myself, wonderingly, 'Once I almost loved you.'

"H. awoke, and smiled upon us with his genial smile, as we returned to the pretty lamp-lit room.

'Have you two children been rehearsing the balcony-scene in the moonlight,' he cried. And then we went back to our London talk and London scandal, and H. told us some admirable stories, more or less embellished by a glowing imagination; and Mrs. H. simpered, placidly, just as she had simpered at

dinner; and Madame contradicted her friend, and laughed at him, and interrupted him by delicious mimicry of his *dramatis personæ*, and behaved altogether in a most fascinating manner.

"I went home slowly in the moonlight, meditating on my evening's entertainment.

"'Have I been happy?' I asked myself. 'No. I have been only amused; and I have come to that period in which little beyond amusement is possible for me.'

"And all my dreams had resolved themselves into this! My Cynthia was not to be found on earth; and the next best thing to the spirit that walks as free as air the clouds among, was—an elegant and fashionable actress.

"My evening had been very pleasant to me; and I was angry with myself, disappointed with myself, because it had been so.

"I thought of Byron. It was not till his star was waning that he found that one companion-spirit who was to console him for the brilliant miseries of his career.

"'Numa was an old man when he met his Ægeria,' I said, to myself. 'Perhaps for me too the divine nymph will appear in life's dreary twilight.'

"I found that my poor C. had been sorely distressed, and even alarmed, by my unwonted absence; and I had no choice but to burden my conscience with a falsehood, or to make her unhappy by the confession that I had been beguiled into the forgetfulness of time in the society of a more fascinating person than her poor, pretty, sentimental self.

"'I found my friend T. at his hut beyond D—— H——,' I said; 'and the fellow insisted on my dining with him.'

"My simple-minded C. had implicit faith in my word, even after that *one* broken promise which had caused this poor child so many tears.

"'I am so glad you found an old friend,' she said; 'but oh, H., I cannot tell you what I have suffered in all these long hours! There is no terrible accident which I have not pictured to myself. I thought how you might lose your footing in the narrow path at the edge of the cliff; I thought you might have been tempted to go round by the sands, and that the tide had risen before you could reach the steps in the cliff. I sent D. to look for you.'

"I told her that on another occasion she must disturb herself with no such fear, and hinted that as E. T. was a very intimate and affectionate friend, I might find myself compelled to dine with him occasionally during his stay.

"'Will he be here long?' she asked, piteously.

"'Oh dear, no,' I replied; 'depend upon it, he will soon be tired of these desolate regions.'

"I had pointed out the cottage to her in one of our walks, and had given her some slight account of the owner.

"After this I was often away from my too sad, too gentle companion. Carlitz seemed to me every day more delightful. I forgot all that I had been told about this most volatile of human butterflies, this most enchanting of the papilionaceous tribe. I, the *blasé* worldling, suffered myself to be caught in that airy net. Most completely was I deluded by her smile of welcome; the sweet, low voice, that grew lower and sweeter when she talked with me; the tender tones in which the enchantress confessed her love for these wild, romantic regions; the unexpected happiness she had found amongst these rugged hills; the disinclination—nay, indeed the positive disgust—with which she contemplated her approaching return to London; all the meretricious charms of the accomplished coquette had given place to the tender grace, the almost divine loveliness of the woman who for the first time discovers that she possesses a heart, and who only becomes aware of that possession in the hour in which she loses it for ever.

"It must not be supposed that I yielded to this new influence without some weak struggle. Every night I went back to my eyrie, determined to see the divine Carlitz no more. Every morning I found C.'s society more hopelessly dull, and was fain to take refuge in a mountain ramble. Unhappily the ramble always ended at the same spot.

"To me had been offered some of the sweetest flatteries ever shaped by woman's lips; but the lovely proprietress of the Bonbonnière was past-mistress of the art, and her flatteries were more subtle than sweetest words. She fooled me to the top of my bent. C. was day by day more neglected; my books were abandoned; my ambitions, my aspirations, for the time utterly forgotten. I had found the supreme good of the Sybarite's life —amusement. And my vanity was flattered by the idea that I was beloved by a woman whose name was synonymous with the verb 'to charm.'

"Yes; I was beloved. How else could I account for that gradual transformation which had changed the most volatile of women into a creature pensive and poetical as Sappho or Heloise? If there had been any striking suddenness in this change, I might have considered it a mere stage-trick; but the transition had been so gradual, and seemed so unconscious. What motive could she have for deceiving me? Had she been free to marry, she might have considered me an eligible *parti*, and this might have been a matrimonial snare; but I had been given to understand that somewhere, undistinguished and uncared for, there existed a person answering to the name of Carlitz, and possessing legal authority over this lovely lady. From matrimonial designs I was therefore safe; and I told myself that these signs and tokens which I beheld with such rapture were the evidence of a disinterested affection.

"I remembered the lady's elegant insolence in the green-room of the Bonbonnière; and it pleased me to think that I had humbled so proud a spirit.

"Whether the sentiment which this most fascinating woman inspired in my mind was ever more than gratified vanity, I know not. For the moment it seemed a deeper feeling; and in thought and word I was already inconstant to that poor child whom I had loved so fondly, so purely, so truly, when we walked, hand locked in hand, on that lovely English shore beyond the little town of B——.

"I hated myself for my inconstancy, but was still inconstant. This woman had a thousand arts and witcheries wherewith to beguile me from my better self. Or were not all her witcheries comprised in one profound and simple art?—SHE FLATTERED ME.

"It is needless to dwell long upon this, my second disappointment in affairs of the heart. The net was spread for me; and, unsuspecting as Agamemnon, I allowed this fair Clytemnestra to entangle me in her fatal web before she gave me the *coup de grâce*.

"Every morning I found some fresh excuse for spending my day in her society. We went upon all manner of excursions, with Mr. and Mrs. H. to play propriety. Any fragment of Gothic tower or ruined stone wall within twenty miles of E. T.'s small domain served as a pretext for a long drive and an impromptu picnic. We went fishing in a rough yacht, and brought up monsters in the way of star-fish and dog-fish, sword-fish and jelly-fish, from the briny deep; but rarely succeeded in securing any piscatorial prize of an edible nature.

"'I don't exactly know what kind of thing we are fishing for,' H. said, piteously; 'but if the boat is to be filled with these savage reptiles, I should be obliged if you would allow me to be put on shore at the earliest opportunity.'

"In all our rambles, Madame's gaiety and good-humour were the chief source of our delight. Her animal spirits were inexhaustible; and for me alone were reserved those occasional touches of sentiment which, in a creature so gay, possessed an unspeakable charm. Her accomplishments were of the highest order, but her reading very little. Yet, by her exquisite tact and *savoir faire*, she made even her ignorance bewitching. And then she had the art of seeming so interested in every subject her companion started, and would listen to my prosiest rhapsody with eyes of mute eloquence, and parted lips that seemed tremulous with suppressed emotion.

"One day, after she had been even more than usually vivacious and enchanting, during a little open-air repast among the most uninteresting ruins in A——, I was surprised, and indeed mystified, by a sudden change in her manner.

"We had wandered away from the ruins, leaving H. and his

placid wife calmly discussing a bottle of E. T.'s old Madeira. Slowly and silently we walked along a solitary path, winding through the bosom of a most romantic glen. I was silent, in sympathy with my companion's unwonted thoughtfulness. Of my own feelings I had spoken to Estelle Carlitz in the vaguest terms. Close and constant as our companionship had been within these few weeks, we had never passed beyond the boundary-line of flirtation. Poetical and sentimental we had been, in all conscience; but our poetry and sentiment had been expressed by eloquent generalities, which had committed neither of us. Yet I could not doubt that the lady numbered me among her slaves; and I dared to believe my bondage was not to be an utterly hopeless captivity.

"'Can you imagine anything more beautiful than this secluded glen?' said Madame Carlitz, suddenly. 'One can scarcely fancy it a part of the same world which contains that noisy whirlpool, London. I cannot tell you how this place has made me hate London. I wish E. T. had never offered me his house. What good have I done myself by coming here? I shall only feel the contrast between perfect peace and unceasing care more keenly when I go back to all my old troubles. It would have been wiser to stay in town, and go on acting, until I realized the dismal prophecies of my medical advisers. If I am doomed to die in harness, my life might as well end one year as another. What does it matter?'

"The words were commonplace enough of themselves, but from the lips of Carlitz the commonest words were magical as the strains of Arion to kindly Dolphin—musical as the seven-stringed lyre with whose chords Terpander healed the wounds of civil war.

"'Do you really mean that you have been happy here among these rugged mountains and barren valleys—you?'

"'Me—I, who speak to you. Happy! Ah, but too happy!' murmured the divine Estelle, in tones of profoundest melancholy. 'My life here has been like a pleasant dream; but it is over, and to-morrow I must set my face towards London.'

"'To-morrow!' I exclaimed. 'Surely this is very sudden.'

"'It is sudden!' answered Madame, with a short, impatient sigh; 'but it is inevitable, as it seems. H. received letters this morning; all sorts of bills and lawyers' threats—horrors which I am incapable of comprehending. I must return; I must, if I die on the journey, *quand même*,' she cried, becoming less English as she became more energetic. 'They will have it, these harpies. I must open my theatre and begin my season, and have the air to gain money *à flots*. Then they will tranquillize themselves. H. will talk to them. This must be. Otherwise they will send their myrmidons here, and put me into their Clichy—their Bench.'

"I expressed my sympathy with all tenderness; but Madame shook her head despairingly, and would not be consoled. I remembered the existence of the unknown Carlitz, and reflected that his accomplished wife could scarcely be subject to the horror of imprisonment for debt while sheltered by the ægis of her coverture. But could I basely remind her of his obscure and obnoxious existence? Sentiment, chivalry, devotion, forbade so business-like a suggestion.

"'My dear Estelle,' I murmured, 'remain in these tranquil regions till you grow weary of nature's solitude and my society. You need have no fear of your creditors while I have power to write a cheque.'

"I pressed the daintily-gloved hand that rested on my arm. It was the first time I had uttered her Christian name. Until this moment I had worshipped on my knees. But the tender down is brushed from the wings of Cupid when he rubs shoulders with Plutus.

"The divine Carlitz drew her hand from mine with a movement of outraged dignity.

"'Do you think so meanly of me as *that?*" she asked, proudly. 'Do you think I would borrow money from *you?*"

"The emphasis on the last word of the first sentence revealed the nobility of the speaker's mind; the emphasis on the last word of the second sentence went straight home to the—vanity—of the hearer.

"'Estelle!' I exclaimed, 'you cannot refuse the poor service of my fortune! Can there be any question of obligation between you and me? Have you not taught me what it is to be happy? have you not——'

"Idem, idem, idem! Why should I transcribe the milk-and-watery version of that old story, which is only worth telling when it is written in the heart's blood of an honest man?

"Deep or earnest feeling I had none. By nature I was inconstant. The love that had glorified the sands of B—— with a light that shone not from sun or moon, had faded from my life. Like a fair child who dies in early infancy, the god had vanished, and the memory of his sweet companionship alone remained to me. I think I had tried to fall in love with Estelle Carlitz, and had failed. But I was none the less anxious to win her regard. There is a fashion in these follies; and to have been beloved by the fair directress of the Bonbonnière would have given me *kudos* amongst my acquaintance of the clubs—nay, even in patrician drawing-rooms, to which the lovely Carlitz herself was yet a stranger.

"This was in my mind as I declared myself in a hackneyed strain of eloquence.

"The lady heard me to the end in silence, and then turned upon me with superb indignation.

"'*Taisez-vous.* Would you offer to lend me money if I were in your own set—if I were not an actress, a person whom you pay to amuse your idle evenings? It is not so long since they refused us Christian burial in my country. Ah! but you are only like the rest. You talk to me of your heart and your banker's-book in the same breath!' she cried, passionately. 'It is mean of you to persecute me with offers of help which you ought to know that I cannot, and will not accept. But you are in your right. It was I who betrayed my poverty. You wrung my secret from me. I beg you to speak of it no more. My affairs are in very good hands. Mr. H. will arrange everything for me; and—I shall go to-morrow. And now let us be friends. Forget that I have ever spoken to you about these things, and forget that I have been angry.'

"She turned to me with her most bewitching smile, and held out her hand. This power of transition was her greatest charm. The gift that made her most accomplished among stage-players made her also most delightful among women. Pity that the woman who is playing a part should always have so supreme an advantage over the woman who is in earnest.

"We spoke no more of money-matters. I assured Madame Carlitz that, in the circle which she was pleased to call my 'set,' there was no one who possessed my respect in greater measure than it was possessed by herself. And at this juncture we heard the jovial voice of the genial H. echoing down the glen, announcing that the carriage was ready for our return.

"'It is agreed that we are to forget everything,' said Madame, 'except that this is to be my last evening in this dear place, and that we are to spend it together.'

"To this I consented with all tender reverence and submission. Our homeward drive was gaiety itself—our dinner, the banquet of a Horace and Lydia after that little misunderstanding about Chloe and the Thurine boy had been settled to the satisfaction of both parties. After dinner Estelle sang to me, accompanying herself on the guitar, which she played with a rare perfection. The old, forgotten ballads come back to me sometimes, and I hear the low sweet voice, and the sound of the waves washing that rocky headland in A——.

"After she had sung as many songs as I could in conscience entreat from her, I asked H. to smoke a cigar with me in the garden. He came promptly at my call; and I know now, though I was persistently blind at the moment, that a little look of intelligence passed between him and my enchantress as he crossed the room to comply with my request.

"We went out upon the lawn, lighted our cigars, and paced

up and down for some few minutes in silence. Then I plunged into the middle of things.

"'H.,' I said, 'how much would it take to clear Madame Carlitz of her pressing pecuniary engagements, and release her from any necessity of commencing a new season at the Bonbonnière for the next few months?'

"H. gave a long whistle.

"'My dear boy, don't think of it, he exclaimed; 'it can't be done. We must open the theatre, make what money we can; and if we can't make a composition, we had better go through the court.'

"'But Carlitz!' I remonstrated.

"'Carlitz is dying,' replied H., with supreme carelessness—'has been dying for the last four years. It 's very trying for her. She 'd have been driving in her barouche, with strawberry leaves on the panel, by this time, if he hadn't been so long about it. But a man can't go on dying for ever, you know; there must be a limit to that sort of thing.'

"'You talk of a composition. Would a cheque for a thousand pounds enable her to satisfy her creditors?'

"Mr. H. deliberated.

"'Fifteen hundred might do,' he said, presently; 'Snoggs and Bangham, the builders, must have a decent lump of money to stop *their* mouths; and there 's Kaliks, the florist, an uncommonly tough customer. Yes, I think something between fifteen hundred and two thousand would do it.'

"'You must contrive to settle matters for fifteen hundred,' I said. 'I know what a clever financier you are, H. Take me to your room, and give me a pen and ink. I have been sending away money this morning, and happen to have my cheque-book in my pocket.'

"'My dear fellow, this generosity is really something utterly unprecedented, and completely overpowering,' exclaimed H., in a fat, choking voice. 'But I doubt if Madame will be induced to accept a loan of this nature. If she does avail herself of your generous offer, the matter must of course be placed on a strictly business-like footing. If a bill of sale on the wardrobe and musical library of the Bonbonniere would satisfy your legal adviser as security——'

"I assured Mr. H. that nothing could be farther from my thoughts than the desire to secure myself from loss by means of a bill of sale.

"'The very name of such an instrument sets my teeth on edge,' I said; 'the money will be to all intents and purposes a free gift, but it may be better to call it a loan.'

"'My dear fellow,' cried H., with a gulp, expressive of gene-

rous emotion, 'this is noble. But you don't know Madame Proud, sir, proud as Lucifer.'

"I remembered that little scene in the glen, and could not dispute the fact of the lady's haughty and somewhat impracticable mind.

"'It can't be done, sir,' said H., decisively; 'it's a pity, but it can't be done.'

"'Why not? Madame Carlitz knows nothing of business matters. I have heard her say as much fifty times.'

"'A mere child, sir—a baby.'

"'In that case there is no difficulty. I will write the cheque; you will settle with the tradesmen, and tell Madame Carlitz nothing except that those obnoxious persons are satisfied. You may take as much credit as you please for your financial powers; I shall not betray the secret of the affair.'

"'Upon my word, my dear friend, you are a prince!' said H., with enthusiasm.

"Nor did he make any further difficulty. We finished our cigars, and went into the house together, with stealthy footsteps; for the thing we were about to do was a kind of treason. H. led me into a little room which he called his den—a room in which he had spent many weary hours trying to square the circle of Madame's pecuniary embarrassments.

"I wrote a cheque for 1,500*l.*, payable to the order of the divine Carlitz.

"'She will endorse it without looking at it, I suppose?' I said.

"'My dear sir, she would endorse the bond of a compact with Mephistopheles. In business matters she is perfectly infantine. I think she has a vague notion that her creditors can send her to the Tower, and have her head cut off, if she fails to satisfy their demands."

"On this we went back to the drawing-room, where Madame asked me, with a pretty, half-offended air, why I had been so long absent. Then H. brewed some Maraschino punch, which was supposed to be an Olympian beverage, and Madame was more charming than ever. If I had been capable of thinking twice of a sum of money squandered on a pretty woman—which I was not—I should have been amply rewarded for my generosity. But I could afford to waste a thousand or two on the caprice of the moment without fear or remorseful twinges or economical regrets after the deed was done.

"It was late when I left the Lodge. Madame and H. followed me to the gate, and bade me good-night under the soft summer stars. Her gaiety had left her by one of those sudden changes that made her charming; and she looked and spoke with a tender sadness as we parted.

"'If I could believe in her depth of feeling, if I could hope——' I said to myself after that pensive parting; and then I remembered the sands at B——, and the vows that I had vowed, and the dreams that I had dreamed.

"'No,' I said, 'if I could trust her, I could not trust myself. With passion and reality I have finished. Let amusement be the business of my life. I will love as Horace loved, and my motto shall be, *Voque la galère*.'

"I had only walked a few yards away from the gate when I remembered that I had left my light overcoat, with a pocket full of letters and papers, in the hall. I ran back; the gate was open, the door open too. I went in, and took my coat from its peg. As I did so, I was surprised to hear a silvery peal of laughter—long and joyous, nay indeed, triumphant, from my enchantress. H.'s bass guffaw sustained the sweet soprano peal; and even placid Mrs. H. assisted with a cheerful second.

"And but three minutes before Estelle had looked at me with eyes so tenderly mournful, had spoken with tones so sadly sweet!

"I lifted the *portière* and looked into the room.

"'I have come back for my coat,' I said.

"The laughter ceased with suspicious abruptness.

"'Oh, do come in! This absurd H. has been telling us the most ridiculous story about Fred M. Of course you know Fred M.?' cried Madame, in nowise disconcerted.

"She insisted that I should stay to hear the anecdote, which H. told for my benefit, with sufficient fluency, and a dash of that club-house mimicry which passes current for faithful imitation. I did not find the anecdote overpoweringly funny; but the lady sounded her peal of silver bells again, long and loudly as before, and I was fain to believe that this frivolous semi-scandalous relation had been the cause of the laughter that had startled me.

"I was not altogether convinced; and that nice appreciation of club-house anecdotes did not appear to me an excellent thing in woman. My adieux were brief and cold, and I walked homeward somewhat *désillusionné*.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VALE.

"At my own quarters trouble unutterable awaited me. While I had amused myself with the more piquant society of Gulnare, my sad sweet love—my Medora—had fled from her solitary bower. I found my household gods shattered; and standing among their ruins, I was fain to confess that I had deserved the stroke. She was gone. The poor child had borne my absence so uncomplainingly that I had been almost inclined to resent a patience that seemed like coldness. Had she been more demon-

strative—had her affection or her jealousy assumed a more dramatic and soul-stirring form—it might have been better for both of us. But the poor child locked all her feelings so closely in her breast, that she had of late seemed to me the tamest and dullest of womankind—an automaton with a woe-begone face.

"The woman who waited upon her in that rude mountain home told me that she was gone. She had gone out early in the day—soon after my own departure—and had not been seen since that time. She had seen me in a carriage with a strange lady, and had, by some means, possessed herself of the secret of my visits to the lodge in the valley. This very woman had, perhaps, been C.'s informant, though she stoutly denied the fact when I taxed her with it.

"She was gone. It mattered little how she had obtained the information that had prompted her to this mad act. For some minutes I stood motionless on the spot where I had heard these tidings, powerless to decide what I ought to do. And then, sudden as a shaft of Apollo the destroyer, there darted into my brain the idea of suicide. That poor benighted child had left her cheerless home to destroy herself.

"I rushed from the house, pausing only to bid the woman send her husband after me with a lantern and a rope. What I was going to do I knew not. My first impulse was to seek her myself, along that desolate coast. She might wander for hours by the sea she loved so well, shrinking from that cold refuge, loth to fling herself into the strong arms of that stern lover for whom she would fain forsake me.

"I waited only till I saw D. emerge with his dimly-twinkling light, called to him to follow me, and then ran down the craggy winding way—the Devil's Staircase—to the sands below.

"And then I remembered the heights above me—the little classic temple in which we had so often sat—and I shivered as I thought what a fearful leap madness might take from that rocky headland. I had told C. the story of Sappho,—of course giving her the ideal Sappho of modern poesy, and not the flaunting, wine-bibbing, strong-minded, wrong-minded Mitylenean lady of Attic comedy,—and we had agreed that Phaon—if indeed there ever existed such a person—was a monster.

"As I hurried along those lonely sands, dark with the shadows of the heights above, I remembered the soft spring sunset in which I had related the well-worn fable, and I could almost feel my love's little hand clinging tenderly to my arm—the hand whose gentle touch I never was to feel again.

"I will not excruciate thee, reader, or bore thee, as the case may be, by one of those prolonged intervals of suspense whereby the venal hack of the Minerva Press would attempt to harrow thy feelings, and eke out his tale of strawless brick. For thee,

too, life has had its fond hopes and idle dreams, its bitter disappointments, chilling disillusions, dark hours of remorse.

"Enough that in this crisis I suffered—suffered as I have never suffered since that day. My search was in vain; nor were the efforts of the men whom I sent in all directions of the coast—by the cliff and by the sands—of more avail. For two days and two nights I suffered the tortures of Cain. I told myself that this girl's blood was upon my head; and if, in that hour when the thought of her untimely death was so keen and unendurable an agony, she could have appeared suddenly before me, I think I should have thrown myself at her feet and offered her the devotion of my life, the legal right to bear my name.

"She did not so appear, and the hour passed. Upon the third morning, after a delay that had seemed an eternity of torture, the post brought me a letter from C. She was at E——, whither she had gone, after long brooding upon my inconstancy.

"'I will not try to tell you all I have suffered,' she wrote; 'my most passionate words would seem to you cold and meaningless when measured against those Greek poets whose verse is your standard for every feeling. I will only say you have broken my heart. My story begins and ends in that one sentence. There must come an end even to such worship as mine. Oh! H., you have been very cruel to me! I have seen you with the beautiful foreign lady, whose society has been pleasanter to you than mine. Your carriage drove past me one day, as I stood half-hidden by the bushes upon a sloping bank above the road, and I heard her joyous laugh, and saw your head bent over her long dark ringlets, and knew that you were happy with her.

'From the hour in which I discovered how utterly you had deceived me, my life has been one continued struggle with despair. You do not know how I loved those whom I left for your sake. In all the passion and pain of your Greek poetry, I doubt if there is a sentence strong enough to express the agony that I feel when I think of those dear friends, and stretch out my arms to them across the gulf that yawns between us. You read me a description of the ghosts in the dark under-world one day, before you had grown too weary of me to let me share your thoughts. I feel like those ghosts, H.

"'Why should I tire you with a long letter? I leave you free to find happiness with the lady whose name even I do not know.

"'Perhaps some day, when you are growing old, and have become weary of all the pleasures upon earth, you will think a little more tenderly of her who thought it a small thing to peril her soul in the hope of giving you happiness, and who awoke from her fond, foolish dream, to find, with anguish unspeakable, that the sacrifice had been as vain as it was wicked.'

"This letter melted me; and yet I was inclined to be angry

with C. for the unnecessary pain her abrupt disappearance had inflicted upon me. I was divided between this feeling and the relief of mind afforded by the knowledge that my folly had not resulted in any fatal event. She had gone to E—— in a fit of jealousy, and she favoured me with the usual feminine reproaches so natural to the narrow female intellect—imagine a *man* reminding his friend at every turn of the sacrifices he had made for friendship!—and she sent me the address of that humble inn where she had taken up her abode, and of course expected me to hasten thither as fast as post-horses could convey me.

"Nothing could be more hackneyed than the end of the little romance. I will not say that I was capable of feeling disappointed because the poor child had not drowned herself; but I confess that this commonplace turn which the affair had taken, grated on my sense of the poetical. It is possible that I had indeed learnt to measure everything by the standard of Greek verse; certain it is that it seemed a sinking in poetry to descend from Sappho's fatal leap to a commercial travellers' tavern at E——.

"'I will start for E—— to-morrow morning,' I said to myself; but without enthusiasm.

"Had I rescued my love from all-devouring ocean—had I found her wandering half-crazed upon the mountains, like that lorn maiden whom even savage beasts compassionated, when she roamed disconsolate, crying,

"'Tall grow the forest trees, O Menalcas,'—

I think I should have taken her to my heart of hearts, and sacrificed my freedom to secure her happiness. But this departure for E——, and the long reproachful letter, savoured of calculation; and against the manœuvres of feminine diplomacy I wore the armour of experience.

"I ordered post-horses for the following morning, and then set off in the direction of my friend's hunting-lodge. 'My bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne,' relieved from the burden of a great terror; but poor C.'s dreary letter was not calculated to put me in high spirits, and I hastened to refresh myself with the society of the sparkling Carlitz.

"I languished for the frivolous talk of people and places I knew—the *olla-podrida* of sentiments and fancies, facts and fictions, spiced with that dash of originality, or at the least audacity, wherewith an accomplished woman of the world flavours her small-talk. Lightly and swiftly I trod the hill-side, pleased when the blue smoke curling from the familiar chimneys met my eager eyes.

"'Is it possible that I am in love with this woman?' I asked myself, wonderingly.

"And then I remembered my despair and terror of yesterday, and the fond regret with which I had thought of poor C., yearning to clasp her to my heart, to promise eternal fidelity.

"The hour had passed. I tried in vain to recall the feeling. I felt that it was more worthy of me than the fickle fancy which led me to the feet of Madame Carlitz; but man is the creature of circumstance, and my best feelings had been *froissé* by the conventional aspect which C.'s flight had assumed.

"A deep-mouthed thunder greeted me as I entered E. T.'s domain, the bass bow-wowing of some canine monster.

"'What new fancy?' I asked myself, as a huge mastiff ran out at me, and made as if he would have rent me limb from limb. I was half inclined to seat myself on the ground, after the example of Ulysses, and the accomplished Mure of Caldwell; but before the creature could commence operations a familiar voice called to him, and E. T. himself emerged from the porch.

"'My dear H.,' he exclaimed, 'what an unexpected felicity! I thought you were at Vienna.'

"'Indeed!' I cried, somewhat piqued. 'Has not Madame Carlitz told you of my whereabouts?'

"'I have not seen her.'

"'You have not seen her!' I exclaimed, in utter bewilderment.

"'No. Madame left yesterday morning with Mr. and Mrs. H. I only arrived last night. Come in doors, old fellow, and let us hear your adventures since our last meeting.

"I followed my friend across the little hall into the bare, tobacco-scented, bachelor sitting-room. The enchanter's wand had been waved a second time, and the fairy vision had melted into thin air. Tiny dogs, dainty and fragile as animated Dresden china, ribbon-adorned guitar, satin-lined work-baskets, velvet-bound blotting-books, *déjeûners* in old Vienna porcelain, card-bowl of priceless Worcester, leopard-skins, lounging-chairs, *portière*, and French prints, had vanished; and in the place which these frivolities had embellished, I beheld the bare battered writing-table and shabby smoking-apparatus of my reckless friend, who stood with his arms a-kimbo, and a tawny-hided bull-dog between his legs, grinning—man and dog both, as it seemed to me—at my discomfiture.

"'What!' cried E., 'it was for the divine Carlitz your visit was intended? My shepherd told me there had been a fine London gentleman hanging about the place while Madame and her following were here; but he could not tell me the fine gentleman's name, and I little thought you were he. Come, my dear boy, fill yourself a pipe, and let's talk over old times. You've been buried among your dryasdust books, I suppose,

while I have been scouring Northern Europe in pursuit of the rapid reindeer and the sulky salmon.'

"'We'll talk as much as you like presently,' I replied, 'but just let me understand matters first. When I left Madame and the H.'s the other night, it was understood they were to remain here some time longer. What took her to town?—is the Bonbonnière season to begin?'

"'The Bonbonnière! My dear friend, this is really dreadful. The lamentable state of ignorance which results from the cultivation of polite learning is, to a plain man, something astounding. Learn, my benighted recluse, that the Bonbonnière Theatre will be opened for the performance of the legitimate drama early next month by the great Mackenzie, who inaugurates his season with the thrilling tragedy of *Coriolanus*, so interesting to the youthful mind from its association with the pleasing studies of boyhood. Madame Carlitz has sold her lease of the pretty little theatre; and on very advantageous terms, I assure you.'

"'She has sold her lease! Does she intend to leave the stage, or to take a larger theatre?'

"'She intends to do neither the one nor the other. She appears on a grander stage, and in an entirely new character. She is going to marry Lord V.'

"'Impossible!'

"'An established fact, my dear boy. The noble earl, as the fashionable journalists call him, has been nibbling at the enchantress's bait for the last twelve months—rather a difficult customer to land, you know—turned sulky when he felt the hook in his jaw, and got away among the rushes; but Carlitz used her gaff, and brought him to land. And now the talk of the town is their impending union. The great ladies *de par le monde* intend to cut her, I believe; but Carlitz has announced her intention of taking the initiative, and cutting *them*. "I shall cultivate the foreign legations," she told little J. C. of the F. O., "and make myself independent of our home nobility." And, egad, she is capable of doing it! She is like Robespierre,—*elle ira loin*,—becauses he believes in herself.'

"'But Carlitz!' I gasped; 'has she got a divorce?'

"'My benighted friend, the decease of M. Carlitz, or Don Estephan Carlitz, of the Spanish wine-trade, is an event as notorious in modern history as the demise of that respectable sovereign, Queen Anne. He died three months ago at the Cape, whence it was his habit to import that choice Amontillado in which he dealt. Madame was prompt to improve the occasion offered by her widowhood; but I have heard it whispered that the noble earl made it a condition that she should clear herself of debt before—to continue the fashionable

journalist's phrase—he led her to the hymeneal altar. Of course you are aware that the noble earl is amongst the meanest of mankind.'

"Yes, I knew V., a little middle-aged man, suspected of wearing a wig, and renowned for harmless eccentricities in the way of amateur coach-building. Alas, what perfidy! Those bright, sympathetic glances, those tender smiles, those low tremulous tones, had been all a part of one coldly-calculated design—the lady-like extortion of so much ready money from the pockets of weak, adoring youth. The divine Estelle had been all this time the plighted wife of Lord V., and had traded upon my admiration in order to secure the means of purchasing a coronet.

"I burst into a savage laugh, and when E. pressed me with questions, I told him the whole story. He, too, laughed aloud, but with evident enjoyment. And then he told me how my wily enchantress had borrowed his rustic retreat, and had come to these remote fastnesses in order to exasperate poor vacillating V. into a tangible offer, and how she had succeeded.

"'I was staying with another fellow further south,' said my friend, 'and received a few lines from Madame the day before yesterday, resigning possession of my shanty, and announcing her approaching espousals; "you must come for the shooting at the Towers next autumn," she said, in her postcript. Begins to patronize already, you see.'

"After this, E. insisted on detaining me to dine with him. Our dinner was ill-cooked, ill-served; and my friend's conversation was a mixture of London gossip and Norwegian sporting experiences. How I loathed the empty, vapid talk! How I envied this mindless animal his barbarous pleasure in the extermination of other animals, little inferior to himself! I went back to my own quarters in a savage humour, and it seemed to me that my anger included all womankind.

"'I have been fooled and deluded by one woman,' I said to myself; 'I will not give myself a prey into the hands of another. C. has chosen to inaugurate our separation. I will not attempt to reverse her decision. My duty I am prepared to do; but I will do no more.'

"Thus resolved, I seated myself at my rough study-table, and wrote a long letter to C.—a very serious, and think a sufficiently kind, letter—in which I set forth the state of my own feelings. 'I had hoped that we should find perfect happiness in each other's society,' I wrote in conclusion; 'I need scarcely tell you that hope has been most cruelly disappointed. You were the first to show that our happiness was an impossibility. You have been the first to sever the tie which I had fondly believed would be lasting. I accept your decision; but I do not consider

myself absolved from the duty of providing for your future. For myself, I shall leave Europe for a wilder and more interesting hemisphere, where I shall endeavour to find forgetfulness of the bitter disappointments that have befallen me here.'

"I then told C. how I designed immediately to open an account for her at a certain bank, upon which she should be at liberty to draw at the rate of four hundred a year.

"'Have no fear for the future,' I wrote; 'a lady with a settled income of four hundred a year can find friends in any quarter of the globe, and need never be troubled with impertinent inquiries about her antecedents. I shall always be glad to hear of your welfare; and if you will keep me acquainted with your whereabouts—letters addressed to the 'Travellers' will always reach me—I shall make a point of seeking you out on my return to England.'

"This letter I despatched, and the chaise that was to have taken me to E—— took me to London, where I made the necessary arrangements with my banker, and whence I departed for a tour of exploration in South America.

"It was after two years' absence that I returned to discover that the account opened in C.'s name had never been drawn upon. And thus ended the story that had opened like an idyll. I have sometimes feared that an unhappy fate must have overtaken this poor foolish girl, and my recollection of her is not unmixed with remorse. But I have reflected that it was more likely her beauty had secured her an advantageous marriage, and that she was unable to avail herself of the provision I had made for her.

"I instituted a careful inquiry, in the hope of discovering her fate, but without result. Her parents at B—— were both dead —strange fatality!—and from no other source could I obtain tidings of my poor C. M. Thus ended my brief, broken love-story. It was with a feeling of relief that I told myself it had thus ended; for I could but remember that the course of events might have taken a very different turn, and one for me most embarrassing.

"If C. had been a woman of the world, or if she had fallen into the hands of some legal adventurer, I might have found myself fixed with a wife, and bound by a chain not to be broken on this side the grave. As it is, I retain my freedom, and only in my most pensive and sombre hours does the pale shadow of that half-forgotten love arise before me, gently reproachful.

"And in these rare intervals of life's busy conflict, when the press and hurry give pause, and I sit alone in my tent, the words of the poor child's letter come back to me with a strange significance. *Perhaps some day, when you are growing old and have become weary of all the pleasures upon earth, you will*

think a little more tenderly of her who thought it a small thing to peril her soul in the hope of giving you happiness.

"Life's intricate journey has so many cross-roads. Who can tell whether he has not sometimes taken the wrong turning? Should I have been happier if I had given C. a legal right to bore me for the remainder of my existence? Happier! For me there is no such possibility. To be happier, a man must first be happy: and happiness is a bright phantom which I have vainly pursued for the last fifteen years. I should at best have been differently miserable.

"I am still free, and I meet the lovely Lady V. in that seventh heaven of the great world to which she has contrived to push her way, and she gives me a patronizing smile and a lofty inclination of her beautiful head; and it is tacitly agreed between us that our rambles and picnics beneath the snow-clad hills are to be as the dreams of days that never were."

Here the *Disappointments of Dion* lost its chief interest for Eustace Thorburn, for here the record of his mother's hapless love ended. Beyond this, and to the very close, he had read the book carefully, weighing every sentence, for it was the epitome of his father's character. In every line there was egotism, in every page the confession of energies and talents wasted in the pursuit of personal gratification. For ever and for ever, the weary wretch pursues the same worthless prize—the prize more difficult of attainment than the new world of a Columbus, or the new planet of a Herschel. With less pains a man might achieve a result that would be a lasting heritage for his fellow-men, and might die with the proud boast of Ulysses on his lips—"I am become a name!"

Through fair and sunny Italy; in wild Norseland; in the granite and marble palaces of St. Petersburg; nay, beyond Caucasian mounts and valleys; amid the ruins of Persepolis; across the sandy wastes, and by the snow-clad mountains of Afghanistan; deep into the heart of Hindostan,—the worldling had pursued his phantom prey; and everywhere, in civilized city or in tiger-hunted jungle, the hunter after happiness found only disappointment.

"A tiger-hunt is the dreariest thing imaginable," he wrote; "it is all waiting and watching, and prowling and lurking behind bushes; a dastardly, sneaking business, which makes one feel more ignoble than the tiger. For genuine excitement the race for the Derby is better; and a man can enjoy a fever of expectation at Epsom which he cannot equal in Bengal."

And anon; "That most musical and meretricious of poets, Thomas Moore, has a great deal to answer for. I have been all through the East in search of his Light of the Harem, and have

found only darkness, or the merest rushlights, the faintest twinkling tapers that ever glimmered through their brief span. And so I return disappointed from the Eastern world, to seek new disappointments in the West."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"STILL FROM ONE SORROW TO ANOTHER THROWN."

EUSTACE closed the book with a sigh—a sigh for the father he had never known, the father who had never known his birth; a sigh for the mother whose life had been sacrificed on so poor an altar. He had been reading for some hours with very little consciousness of the passage of time.

"You seem to be interested in that book, Mr. Thorburn," said a familiar voice from the bank above him.

He started to his feet, dropped his book, turned, and looked up at the speaker. The voice was the voice of Harold Jerningham; and that gentleman was standing on the bank, pointing downward at the fallen book with the tip of his extended cane, as he might have pointed to some creature of the reptile tribe.

"You startled me a little, Mr. Jerningham," said Eustace, as he stooped to pick up the book.

"Your study must have been deeply interesting to you, or you could scarcely have been so unconscious of my footsteps. Permit me." He took the volume from the young man's hand, and turned the leaves listlessly. "One of your favourite dialogues, I suppose? No; an English novel. *Dion! Dion?* I have some recollection of a book called *Dion*. What a very shabby person he looks after the lapse of years! Really, the authors of that time suffered some disadvantage at the hands of their publishers. What dismal gray binding! what meagre-looking type! The very paper has a musty odour. And you are deeply interested in *Dion?*"

"Yes; I am deeply interested."

"The book strikes you as powerful?"

"No. The writer strikes me as a consummate scoundrel."

Mr. Jerningham smiled a faint smile. His smiles were for the most part faint and wan, like the smiles of a wandering spirit in the house of Hades.

"Do not be so energetic in your denunciation, Mr. Thorburn," he said, quietly. "The man who wrote *Dion* was as other men of his time—just a little selfish, perhaps, and anxious to travel on the sunny side of the great highway."

"Did you know him?" asked Eustace, with sudden eagerness.

"Not the least in the world. But I know his book. People talked of it a little at the time, and there was some discussion

about the authorship; all kinds of improbable persons were suggested. Yes; it all comes back to me as I look at the pages. A very poor book; stilted, affected, coxcombical. What a fool the man must have been to print such a piece of egotism!"

"Yes. It seems strange that any man could publish a book for the purpose of proclaiming himself a villain."

"Not at all. But it is strange that a man can give his villany to the world in a *poor* book—a book not containing one element of literary success; and that he should take the trouble of writing all this. Yes, it is very strange. An indolent kind of man, too—as one would imagine from the book. A very feeble book! I see a wrong tense here in a Latin quotation. The man did not even know his Catullus. Thanks."

Mr. Jerningham returned the volume with a graceful listlessness and with a half-regretful sigh, as if it wearied him even to remember so feeble a book. He strolled away, leaving Eustace wondering that he should have fallen across a man who was familiar with his father's book, and who in person resembled his father.

"If Mr. Jerningham had written his own biography, it might have been something like this book," he said to himself. And then another IF—stupendous, terrible—presented itself to his mind.

But this he dismissed as an absurd and groundless fancy.

"What accident is more common than such a likeness as that between us two?" he asked of himself. "The world is full of such half-resemblances, to say nothing of the Lesurges and Debosques who are guillotined in mistake for one another."

He left the seat on the river-bank, and strolled slowly homeward by a different path from that Mr. Jerningham had taken.

His perusal of the book had been upon one point conclusive to him. The few details of the scene had told him at first that it had been laid in the British dominions. Reflection convinced him that Scotland was the locality of that solitary mountain habitation where his mother's sad days had been spent.

This had been Celia's unknown power. This habitation upon Scottish soil was the hold which she had possessed over her lover. In the character of his wife he had brought her to Scotland, and there had made his domicile with her during a period of several months; and by the right of that Scottish home, that open acknowledgment, she *was* his wife. She had fled from him, unconscious of this. But if she had been conscious of this power, her son told himself that she would have been too noble to use it; too proud to call herself a wife by favour of a legal quibble.

"I will talk it over with Uncle Dan," Eustace said to himself; "and if he and I are agreed upon the subject, I will go to

Scotland and hunt out the scene, supposing that to be possible from so slight a clue as this book will give us."

He knew that by the law of Scotland he was in all probability legitimatized; but not for the wealth of Scotland would he have sought to establish such a claim upon that nameless father, whom of all men that ever lived upon this earth he most despised.

"He abandoned her to lonely self-upbraiding, long, dreary days of remorse, humiliation, sorrow past all comfort—the thought of the sorrow her sin had wrought for those she loved. He let her bear this bitter burden without one effort to lighten or to share it. He deserted the woman he had destroyed, because—she did not amuse him. Is this what wealth, and polite letters, and civilization make of a man? God forbid! Such a man should have worn imperial purple, and died the imperator's common death in the days of Rome's decadence. He is an anachronism in a Christian age."

He walked slowly back to the cottage, where he had but just time to dress for dinner. The evening passed quietly. Of the four people assembled in M. de Bergerac's drawing-room, three were singularly quiet and thoughtful.

The summer dusk favoured silent meditation. Mr. Jerningham sat apart in a garden chair under the long rustic verandah, half-curtained with trailing branches of clematis and honeysuckle; Eustace sat in the darkest corner of the low drawing-room, where Helen occupied herself in playing dreamy German melodies upon her piano. M. de Bergerac strolled up and down before the lawn, stopping every now and then to say something to his friend Harold Jerningham.

"How silent and thoughtful we are to-night!" he cried at last, after having received more than one random answer from the master of Greenlands. "One would think you had seen a ghost, Harold; your eyes are fixed, like the eyes of Brutus at Philippi, or of Agamemnon when the warning shade of Achilles appeared to him, before the sailing of the ship that was to take him home—to death. What is the phantom at which you gaze with eyes of gloom?"

"The ghost of the past," answered Mr. Jerningham, as he rose to join his friend. "Not to Lot's wife alone is it fatal to look back. I have been looking back to-day, Theodore."

Within, all was silent except the piano, softly touched by slow, gentle hands, that stole along the keys in a languid, legato movement.

The player wondered at the change which had come upon her companion and fellow-student, and wondered to find the change in him so keen a sorrow to herself.

Very gloomy were the thoughts of Eustace as he sat in his dark corner, with closed eyes, and hands clasped above his head. "How dare I tell him who and what I am, and then ask for the hand of his only daughter? Can I hope that even his simplicity will pardon such a family history as that which I must tell?"

All through the dark hours of that midsummer night he lay awake, brooding over the pages he had read, and thinking of the stain upon his name. To an older man, steeped in the hard wisdom of the world, the stigma would have been a lesser agony. He would have counted over to himself the list of great names made by the men who bore them, and would have found for himself crumbs of comfort. But for Eustace there was none. He had set up his divinity, and it seemed to him that only the richest tribute could be offered upon a shrine so pure.

His thoughts deepened in gloom as the night waned, until the fever in his mind assumed the force of inspiration. Rash and impetuous as youth and poetry, he resolved that for him hope there was none, except far a-field of this Arcadian dwelling.

"Shall I offer myself, nameless, in order to be refused?" he asked. "No. I will leave this too dear home, and go out into the world to make myself a name among modern poets before I ask confession or promise of Helen de Bergerac."

To make himself a name among modern poets! The dream was a bold one. But the dreamer told himself that the ladder of Fame is sometimes mounted with a rush, and that for the successful writer of magazine lyrics it needs but a year or so of isolation and concentrated labour, a year or so of fervent devotion in the temple of Apollo, a year or so of poetic quietism, to accomplish the one great work which shall transform the graceful singer of modern Horatian odes into the world-renowned poet.

"I will tear myself away from this place before the week is out," he said, with resolution that made the words a vow; "'tis too bright, too beautiful, too happy, and is dangerous as Armida's garden for the man who would fain serve apprenticeship to the Muses."

CHAPTER XXIX.

LEFT ALONE.

While Mr. Jerningham dawdled away existence among the woods and hills of Berkshire, his wife's life was marked by changes more eventful, and ruffled by deeper passions.

To Lucy Alford the lady of River Lawn had shown herself a kind and generous friend. Not long had the poor child enjoyed the luxurious quiet of the Hampton villa when she was suddenly summoned away from it. Mr. Desmond had managed her

father's affairs and pacified her father's creditors; with what pecuniary sacrifice was only known to himself. But a sterner gaoler than the warder of Whitecross Street lay in wait for Lucy's father, ready to stretch forth the icy hand that was to arrest that battered and broken wayfarer.

Debts and difficulties, disappointments and humiliations, with constant habits of inebriation, had done their fatal work for Tristram Alford. 'Twas but a poor wreck of humanity which emerged from the dreary city prison, when Laurence told his old tutor that he was free. The old man had suffered from one paralytic seizure long ago, in his better days of private tutorship. He had a second seizure in the Whitecross Street ward, but made light of the attack; and although he knew himself to be a wreck, was happily unconscious how near was the hour of his sinking.

Lucy returned to the dreary Islington lodgings, to find her father strangely, nay, indeed, alarmingly, altered. She wrote to Mrs. Jerningham to tell her fears, and Emily made haste to send a physician to see the invalid. The physician shook his head despondently, but recommended rest and change of air. These, with the aid of Mrs. Jerningham's ample purse, were easily procured, and Lucy and her father were despatched to Ventnor.

Laurence saw the physician, and asked for a candid opinion upon Tristram Alford's state.

"The man is an habitual drunkard," replied the doctor, "and has evidently been killing himself with brandy for the last ten years. If you take the brandy-bottle away from him, he will die; if you let him go on drinking, he will die. The case is beyond a cure. The man's brain is alcoholized. His next attack must be fatal."

Having once enlisted Mrs. Jerningham's friendship for Lucy Alford, Mr. Desmond felt that the young lady's fortunes had passed out of his care. Already Emily had shown herself so kind and generous that it would have been base ingratitude to doubt her charity in every new emergency. He therefore held himself aloof from Lucy and her father, and only from Mrs. Jerningham did he hear how it fared with the girl in whose fate he had taken so benevolent an interest. But while he made no overt attempt to comfort or assist her in the hour of trial and trouble, he thought of her, and pitied her, with a constancy that was at once perplexing and unpleasing to his own mind.

"Poor little thing!" he said to himself, when he thought of the motherless girl watching the fading hours of her sole protector. And he wondered to perceive how much tenderness it was possible to infuse into those three common words. "Poor little thing! Tristram Alford cannot last many weeks—that is certain. And then—and then? She will be left quite alone in

the world. And she must suppress all sign of her natural grief, and enact one of *those ladies*—ever so slightly expurgated—in *Côtelettes sautées chez Vefour*. What a dreary present! what a hopeless future!"

And at this point Mr. Desmond would dig his pen savagely into the paper, destroy the quill of an unoffending goose, and fling it from him in a sudden rage.

"What is it to me?" he asked himself. "There are hundreds of friendless girls in London for whom the future is as hopeless. Am I going to turn Quixote, and ride a tilt against the windmills of modern civilization?"

One morning in February the editor of the *Areopagus* found an envelope edged with deepest black upon his breakfast-table. It contained a brief despairing scrawl from Lucy, smeared and blotted with many tears. Death had claimed his victim. The third seizure had come, and all was over.

"I cannot tell you how kind Mrs. Jerningham has been," wrote the mourner; "all is arranged for the funeral. It is to take place on Friday. My poor dear will rest in a pleasant spot. It is very hard to bear this parting; but I think it would have seemed harder to me if he had died in London." And then followed little pious sentences, in which faith struggled with despair.

"He was always good and kind," she wrote; "I cannot recall one cross word from his dear lips. He did not go to church so regularly as religious people think right; but he was very good. He read the Bible sometimes, and cried over it; and wherever we lodged, the little children loved him. It was not in his nature to be harsh or unkind. May God teach me to be as good and gentle as he was, and grant that we may meet some day in a happier world!"

"The funeral is to be on Friday," repeated Mr. Desmond, when he had folded and put away the letter. He was on the point of endorsing it with the rest of his correspondence, but changed his mind, and laid it gently aside in a drawer of his desk. "Not amongst tradesmen's lies, and samples of double-crown, and contributors' complaints," he said. "On Friday? Yes; I will attend my poor old tutor's funeral. It will comfort her to think that *one* friend followed him to his grave."

Early on the appointed morning, Mr. Desmond knocked at the door of the Ventnor lodging-house.

"Miss Alford is at home, of course," he said to the maid. "Be so good as to take her this card, and tell her that I have come to attend the funeral, but will not intrude upon her."

He spoke in a low voice; but those cautious, suppressed tones are of all accents the most penetrating. The door of the parlour was opened softly, and Mrs. Jerningham came out into the passage.

"I recognized your voice," she said. "How very good of you to come!"

"Not at all. But how good of *you* to come! I had no idea that I should meet you here."

"And I was quite sure that I should meet *you* here," replied Emily, with the faintest possible sneer.

"Is Lucy in that room?"

"Yes."

"I do not want to see her. I wished to show my regard for that poor old man. I spent many pleasant days under his roof, and he has made so lonely an ending. It is very good of you to come, Emily; and your presence here relieves me very much with regard to that poor girl's future. I do not think you would be here if you were not really interested in her."

"Yes, Laurence; I am really interested in—your *protégée*."

"She is not my *protégée;* but I wish you to make her yours, because I scarcely think you could find a creature more in need of your charity. Poor child! she is very much distressed, I suppose."

"For the moment she is heartbroken. I shall take her away from here this evening."

"My dear Emily, I knew I was safe in relying on your noble nature!" exclaimed the editor, with enthusiasm.

"For pity's sake, do not be so grateful. I have done no more than I would for any other helpless woman whom fate flung across my path. In the whole affair there is only one element that makes the act a sacrifice."

"And that is——?"

"What only woman can feel or understand. Pray, do not let us talk about it. The funeral will not take place for an hour."

"I will go and get a band for my hat, and return here for the ceremony. There will be one mourning-coach, I suppose."

"Yes. The doctor has kindly promised to act as chief mourner. There is no one else."

"Poor Tristram! If you only knew that man's appreciation of Greek; and Greek is the only language which requires a special genius in the scholar. And to die like this!"

Mr. Desmond departed to get his hat bound with the insignia of grief. Mrs. Jerningham went back to the parlour, where the orphan sat with listless hands loosely locked, and vacant, tearless eyes, lost in a stupor of grief. But even in this stupor she had recognized the voice of her dead father's only friend.

"Was not that Mr. Desmond in the passage just now?" she asked.

"Yes; he has come down to attend his old friend's funeral."

"How good of him! How kind you both are to me!" murmured Lucy. "Oh, believe me, I am grateful. And yet, dear

Mrs. Jerningham, I feel as if it would be better for me to be going to lie by *his* side in that peaceful grave."

"No, Lucy. Your life is all to come. You have known sorrow and trouble; but you have not drained the cup of happiness only to find the bitterness of the draught. *That* is real despair. You have not outlived your hopes, and your dreams and your faith—nay, indeed, your very self—as I have."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MORLAND COUGH.

LAURENCE DESMOND heard the sublimely solemn service read above his old tutor's coffin, and left Ventnor without seeing Lucy Alford. Again and again he told himself that with the orphan girl's future fate he had no concern. He had given her a good friend—and a friend of her own sex—who would doubtless afford her help and protection, directly or indirectly, in the future.

"She has passed out of my life," he said to himself; "poor little thing! Let me forget that I ever saw her."

When Mr. Desmond paid his next visit to River Lawn he found Lucy comfortably installed there, and looking pale as the snowdrops in her simple mourning. She said a few tremulous words in answer to his gentle greeting, and then left the room.

"She does not like to talk of her father," Mrs. Jerningham said, when she was gone; "and I dare say she has run away to escape your possible condolences. He seems on the whole to have been rather a worthless person, but she mourns him as if he had been a saint. 'We were so happy together,' she says; and then she tells me of his interest in her career, and the patience with which he would sit in the boxes night after night to see her act, and then would tell her the points in which she failed, and the points in which she succeeded, and lament the impossibility of her wearing a mask, with some dreadful pipe or mouthpiece, like the Greek actors; and she tells me of their cosy little suppers after the theatre, pettitoes—WHAT are pettitoes?—and baked potatoes, and sausages, and other dreadful things which it would be certain death for persons in society to eat; and so the poor child runs on. She is the most affectionate, grateful creature I ever met, and I think she is beginning to love me."

"She has reason to do so," replied Mr. Desmond. "I suppose she will be obliged to go on the stage again. I have a promise of an engagement for her from my friend Hartstone."

"I hope she will not be obliged to accept it. Her father's death has caused a complete change in her feelings with regard to the

dramatic profession. The poor old man's companionship seems to have supported and sustained her in all her petty trials—and now he has gone, she shrinks from encountering the difficulties of such a life. So, with my advice and such assistance as I can give her, she is trying to qualify herself for the position of governess. Her reading is more extensive than that of most girls, and she is working hard to supply the deficiencies of her education."

"I am very glad to hear that," Laurence answered, heartily "I consider such a life much better suited to her than the uncertainties of a provincial theatre."

And then he remembered that in the existence of a governess there were also uncertainties, trials, temptations, loneliness; and it seemed to him as if Lucy Alford's destiny must be a care and a perplexity to him to the end of time.

"I shall keep Lucy with me for some weeks to come," said Mrs. Jerningham; "for I find her a most devoted little companion, and she is exercising her powers as my reader and amanuensis, in order to prepare herself for the caprices of some valetudinarian dowager in the future."

"You are very good, Emily."

"Yes, because I am of some use to your Miss Alford;—that is my virtue in your eyes, Laurence."

"If you are going to talk in that manner, I shall try to catch the next train."

"It is very absurd, is it not?" cried Mrs. Jerningham, with a light laugh; "but you see it is natural to a woman to be jealous; and a woman who lives in such a place as this has nothing to do but cherish jealous fancies."

"Let us understand each other once and for ever," said Laurence, gravely. "To me Lucy Alford seems little more than a child: the time in which I used to see her frisking about with a hideous Scotch terrier, and dressed in a brown-holland pinafore, is not so very remote, you know. I found her in the most bitter need of a friend; and so far as I could befriend her, I did so, honestly, biding the time in which I could enlist a good woman's sympathy in her behalf. Having done that, I have done all, and I wash my hands of the whole affair. If there is the least hazard of jealousy where Miss Alford is concerned, I will not re-enter this house while she inhabits it."

"That would be to punish me for my philanthropy. No, Laurence, I am not jealous of this poor child, any more than I am jealous of every other woman to whom you speak. Jealousy is a chronic disease, you see, a kind of slow fever, and it has taken possession of me."

"Emily!"

"I think it is only another name for nerves. Do not look at

me with such consternation. What is it Mr. Kingsley says?—'Men must work, and women must weep.' They *must*, you see! It is the primary necessity of their existence; and if they have no real miseries, no husbands drifting over the harbour-bar to death, they invent sorrows, and weep over them."

To this kind of talk Mr. Desmond was tolerably well accustomed. It is the kind of talk which a man whom fate, or his own folly, has placed in a false position is sure to hear. One can fancy that Paris must have had rather a heavy time of it with Helen; and that when he went forth prancing like a war-horse to meet Menelaus, his gaiety may have in some degree arisen from his sense of escaping an impending curtain-lecture from the divine Tyndarid.

For some weeks after this conversation the editor of the *Areopagus* contrived to be more than usually occupied with the affairs of his paper. He sent Mrs. Jerningham tickets for concerts, and new books, and new music; but River Lawn he avoided. It was only upon a royal command from the lady that he appeared there one afternoon, about six weeks after the funeral at Ventnor.

He found Lucy looking better; but Lucy's patroness was paler than usual, and was much disturbed by a dry hacking cough, which somewhat alarmed Mr. Desmond.

Emily herself, however, made very light of the cough, nor did Mrs. Colton seem to consider it of any importance.

"It is only a winter cough," said Mrs. Jerningham; "I have suffered from the same kind of thing every winter, if, indeed, you can call it suffering. I suppose one must pay some penalty for living by the river. But I would not exchange my Thames for the gift of exemption from cough."

"It is quite a Morland cough," said Mrs. Colton; "my sister, Emily's mamma, had just the same kind of cough every winter."

Morland was the name of Mrs. Jerningham's maternal ancestry. Laurence bethought himself that Emily's mother had died at thirty years of age, and he was not inclined to make light of the Morland cough.

"I wish you would come to town to-morrow and see Dr. Leonards," he said, by and by, when he and Emily were out of earshot of Mrs. Colton; "I don't see why you should go on coughing, or stay by the river, if Hampton disagrees with you."

"Dr. Leonards is the great man for the chest, is he not?" asked Mrs. Jerningham. "It would be really too absurd for me to see him. I have nothing whatever the matter with my chest, except a little pain occasionally, which Mr. Canterham, the Hampton surgeon, calls indigestion. Dr. Leonards would laugh at me."

"So much the better if he does," answered Laurence. "But

I should very much like you to see him. You will do so, won't you, Emily, to oblige me?"

"To oblige you!" repeated Mrs. Jerningham, regarding him with a thoughtful gaze. Why are you so anxious to consult the oracle? Is it to resolve a doubt, or to confirm a hope?"

"Emily!"

"Oh, forgive me!" she cried, holding out her hand. "I am always thinking or saying something wicked. The Calvinists must surely be right; for I feel as if I had been created a vile creature, 'not born to be judged, but judged before I was born.' I will go to see your Dr. Leonards. I will do anything in the world to please you!"

"My dear Emily! to please me you have only to be happy yourself," he answered, with real affection.

"Ah! that is just the one thing that I cannot do. My life is all wrong somehow, and I cannot make it right. I have been trying to square the circle, ever since my marriage—with such unspeakable care and trouble—and the circle is no nearer being square. The impracticable, unmeasurable curves still remain, and are not to be squared by my power of calculation."

"Ah, Emily, if you had only trusted in me, and waited!"

"Ah, Laurence, if you had only spoken a little sooner!"

"I would not speak till I had secured a certain income. I had been taught to believe that no woman in your position could exist without a certain expenditure."

"Ah, that is the false philosophy of your modern school! A man tells himself that with such or such a woman he could live happily all the days of his life, but his friends warn him that the lady has been educated in a certain style, and must therefore be extravagant—so he keeps aloof from her; and some day, necessity, family ambition, weariness, pique, anger—Heaven knows what incomprehensible feminine impulse—tempts her to the utterance of the most fatal lie a woman's lips can shape. She marries a man she can never love, and she has her equipage, and her servants, and her house in Mayfair, and all the splendours *he* has been told she cannot live without: and she *does* live—the life of the world, which is living death."

"For God's sake no more! You stab me to the heart."

He covered his face with his hands, and thought of what she had been saying to him. Yes, it was all true! His worldly wisdom had blighted that fair young life. Because he had been prudent; because he had taken counsel with his long-headed friends of the world, and had believed them when they said that the horrors of Pandemonium were less horrid than the dismal, muddling torments of a pinched household—because of these things Emily Jerningham's mind had been embittered, and her fair name sullied. And he could not undo the past. No. Strike

Harold Jerningham from the roll of the living to-morrow, and leave those two free to wed, the haughty woman and the world-worn man who should stand side by side before God's altar, would have little more than their names in common with the lovers who walked arm-in-arm ten years ago in the garden at Passy.

"Yes, Emily, my sin is heavier than yours!" he said, presently. "With both, want of faith was the root of evil. If you had trusted in me, if I had trusted in Providence, all would have been different. But it is worse than useless to bewail those old mistakes. Let us make the best of what happiness remains to us. The pleasures of a real friendship, and one of those rarest of all alliances—a friendship between man and woman on terms of intellectual equality."

"There are wretched misogynists who say that kind of thing never has answered," said Mrs. Jerningham; "but we will try to prove them miserable maligners. And you will never regret the loss of a wife, or feel the want of a home, eh, Laurence?"

"Never, while you abstain from foolish jealousies," he answered boldly, and in all good faith.

Mrs. Jerningham drove into town next day, to see Dr. Leonards, in accordance with her promise to Laurence Desmond. She was accompanied by Mrs. Colton, who thought it rather absurd that any one should take so much trouble about a Morland cough; but who was not ill-pleased to spend an hour in the delightful diversion of shopping, and to visit one of the winter exhibitions of pictures, while the horses took their rest and refreshment.

Dr. Leonards said very little, except that Mrs. Jerningham's chest was rather weak, and her nerves somewhat too highly strung. He asked her a few questions, wrote her a prescription, enjoined great care, and requested her to come to him again in a fortnight, or, better still, allow him to come to her.

"For now, really, you ought not to be out to-day," he said, glancing at a thermometer. "There is the slightest appearance of fever; and altogether, a drive from Hampton is about the worst possible thing for you. You ought to be sitting in a warm room at home."

"But look at my wraps," exclaimed Mrs. Jerningham.

"My dear lady, do you really imagine that your sables can protect you from the air you breathe? An equable temperature of about sixty degrees is what you require; and here you are, on a bleak March day, riding thirty miles in a draughty carriage. I must beg you to be more careful."

Mrs. Colton on this assured Dr. Leonards that the cough was only a family cough; but the physician repeated his injunction.

"Prevention is better than cure," he said. "I can say nothing wiser than the old adage. Thanks. Good morning."

This was the patient's dismissal; the two ladies returned to their carriage.

"I hope Mr. Desmond will be satisfied," said Mrs. Jerningham; "and now let us go to see the French pictures."

At the French picture-gallery the ladies found Mr. Desmond, absorbed in the contemplation of a Meissonier.

"How good of you to be here!" exclaimed Mrs. Jerningham, brightening as she recognized him; "and so, for once in a way, you really have a leisure morning."

"I never have a leisure morning; at this very moment I ought to be 'sitting upon' a sensational historian, who fancies himself something between Thucydides and Macaulay. But you told me you were coming here, and so I postpone my sensational historian's annihilation until next week, and come to hear what Dr. Leonards says of your cough."

"Dr. Leonards says very little. I am to take care of myself. That is all."

"What does he mean by care?"

"Oh, I suppose I am to go on wearing furs, and that kind of thing. And I am to see all the pictures of the year; and you are to find plenty of leisure mornings; and so on."

In this careless manner did the patient dismiss the subject; nor could Laurence extort any further information from her. He attacked Mrs. Colton next, but could obtain little intelligence from that lady; and beyond this point he was powerless to proceed. He, Laurence Desmond, could not interrogate Dr. Leonards upon the health of Harold Jerningham's wife. If she had been dangerously ill, interference was no privilege of his. And as her illness was of a very slight and unalarming character, he was fain to content himself with the fact that she had placed herself under the direction of an eminent physician.

That day was one of the few happy days that had been granted of late to Emily Jerningham. Mr. Desmond was even more devoted and anxious than he had shown himself for a long time. He accompanied the two ladies to picture-galleries, and silk-mercers, florists, and librarians, and did not leave them till he saw them safely bestowed in their carriage for the homeward journey, banked-in with parcels, and in an atmosphere stifling with exotics.

"What, in the name of the Sphinx, do women do with their parcels?" he asked himself, as he went back to his chambers. "Mrs. Jerningham comes to town at least once a fortnight, and she never goes back to Hampton without the same heterogeneous collection of paper packages. What can be the fate of that mysterious mass? How does she make away with that mountain of frivolity, packed in whitey-brown paper? I never see any trace of the contents of those inexplicable packets. They

never seem to develop into anything beyond their primeval form. To this day I know not what butterflies emerge from those paper chrysalids. And if she had been my wife, I must have found money to pay for all those frivolities. I must have battered my weary brains, and worked myself into a premature grave, to supply that perennial stream of parcels."

CHAPTER XXXI.

LUCY'S FAREWELL TO THE STAGE.

For Lucy Alford life's outlook seemed very dreary after that chill day in February, when her father's bones were laid in their resting-place. He had not been a good father—if measured by the ordinary standard of parental duty—but he had been a kind and gentle one, and his daughter lamented him with profound regret. He had allowed her to grow up very much as she pleased, taking no pains to educate her, but suffering her to pick up such stray crumbs of learning as fell from the table of the professional crammer; but by reason of this very neglect Tristram Alford had seemed to his child the very centre of love and indulgence. And, beyond this, he had believed in her, and admired her, and sustained her fainting spirit, when the theatrical horizon was darkest—when managers were unkind, and sister-actresses malevolent—by such prophetic visions of future triumphs, and such glowing anticipations of coming happiness, as the man of sanguine temperament can always evolve from his inner consciousness and a gin-bottle. The poor child had found comfort and hope in those shadowy dreams, happily unconscious that her father's fancies were steeped in alcohol; and now that he was gone, the hopes and dreams seemed to have perished with him.

Thus it was that Lucy shrank from the idea of recommencing her theatrical labours as from a hopeless and a dreary prospect. Nor were her feelings on this subject uninfluenced by the sentiments of those two persons who were now her sole earthly friends, Laurence Desmond's shuddering horror of the "Cat's-meat Man," his furtive glance at the little red-satin boots in which she was to have danced the famous comic dance so much affected of late years, had been keenly noted, and remembered with cruel pain.

"How can he be so prejudiced against the profession?" she asked herself. And then she thought of Shakspeare, and of the Greek dramatists, whose every syllable and every comma had been so laboriously studied in the cramming season at Henley—and was slow to perceive that the more a man loves his Shakspeare and his Sophocles, the less indulgence is he likely to show to the "Cat's-meat Man."

Mrs. Jerningham contemplated the dramatic profession from the stand-point of a woman who had known poverty, but had

never found herself in the streets of London without an escort, or her brougham, and who had spent her life in a circle where every woman's movements are regulated by severe and immutable laws.

"How will you pursue your professional career, now that your poor papa is gone, my dear?" she asked, kindly, when she came to discuss Miss Alford's future. "You cannot possibly travel about the country without a *chaperone*—some nice elderly person, who could take great care of you, and whose respectability would be a kind of guarantee for your safety. It is quite out of the question that you should go from town to town *without* some such person."

Lucy blushed as she thought of the many damsels who did go from town to town unattended by this ideal representative of the proprieties; of Miss Gloucester, the walking-lady, who had walked in that ladylike capacity for the last fifteen years, and knew every town in the United Kingdom, and every *fit-up* or temporary temple of the drama in the British Islands—and who had supported her bed-ridden old mother in a comfortable lodging at Walworth, and had dressed herself with exquisite neatness, and preserved a reputation without spot or blemish, during the whole period, on a salary averaging twenty-five shillings per week. She thought, with a deeper blush, of the two ballet-dancers, Mademoiselle Pasdebasque and Miss May Zourka, who wandered over the face of the earth together, loud, and reckless, and riotous as a couple of medical students, and who were dimly suspected of having given suppers—suppers of oysters, and pork-pies, and bottled-beer—to the officers of different garrisons, in the course of their wanderings. Of these, and of many other unprotected strollers—some bright, pure gentle girls, of good lineage and careful education; many honest, hard-working, and self-sacrificing bread-winners; others painted and disreputable wanderers, who made their profession a means to their unholy ends—did Lucy think, as Mrs. Jerningham laid down the law about the respectable elderly *chaperone*.

"Do you know any one of unblemished respectability with whom you could travel?" Mrs. Jerningham asked, after a pause.

Miss Alford's mental gaze surveyed the ranks of her acquaintance, and the image of Mrs. M'Grudder arose before her, grim and terrible. Unblemished respectability was the M'Grudder's strong point. The fact that she was not an immoral person was a boast which she was apt to reiterate at all times and seasons, appropriate or inappropriate; and her spotless fame had furnished her with many a Parthian shaft wherewith to wound helpless evil-doers of the Pasdebasque and May Zourka class, in that Eleusinian temple of theatrical life, the ladies' dressing-room. Abroad, guilty Pasdebasque has the best of it.

She attends race-meetings in her carriage, and flaunts her silks and velvets before the awe-stricken eyes of the little country town. The garrison provides her with bouquets, and applauds her *entrées* with big noisy hands and a bass roar of welcome; while her benefits are favoured with a patronage seldom accorded to the benefits of innocence. But the Nemesis awaits her in the dressing-room. There the dread Furies avenge the wrongs of their weaker sisterhood, and retribution takes the awful voice of M'Grudder.

Ruthlessly does that lady perform her appointed duty. Loud are her expressions of wonder at the triumphs of *some* people; her bewilderment on perceiving the superb attire which *some* people can procure out of a pittance of two guineas per week; her regret that on the occasion of *her* benefit the 17th Prancers had held themselves disdainfully aloof from the theatre, though her Lady Douglas *had* been compared to the performance of the same character by the great Siddons, and by judges *quite* as competent as the Prancers; and anon, in the next breath, her inconsistent avowal of thankfulness to Providence that her dress-circle had been empty, rather than filled as was the dress-circle of Mademoiselle Pasdebasque.

Lucy thought of Mrs. M'Grudder, who had at divers times taken upon herself the chaperonage of some timid young aspirant, and beneath whose ample wing, if rumour was to be trusted, the hapless neophyte had known a hard time. No, the dramatic profession at best had its trials; but life spent in the companionship of Mrs. M'Grudder would have been too bitter a martyrdom.

This was the beginning of the end of Miss Alford's professional career. She had pondered much upon Laurence Desmond's evident dislike to her position, and had taken that dislike deeply to heart. The glamour was fast fading from the fairy dream of her childhood. She had played at Electra and Antigone—she had stood before her looking-glass, inspired, and radiant with passionate emotion, fancying herself Juliet or Pauline; and all her dreams had ended in—a page's dress, and a foolish comic song.

Mrs. Jerningham's influence speedily completed the work of disenchantment; and before Tristram Alford had been dead a month, his daughter had bidden farewell to the stage—in no brilliant apotheosis of bouquets and clamorous chorus of enraptured dramatic critics, eloquent as Pythoness on tripod, but in the sad silence of her own lonely chamber. She had said her doleful good-bye to the dreams of her youth, and had begun the practical career of a woman who stands quite alone in the world, and who has no hope save in her own patient industry.

"If I had any one to work for," she thought, sadly, "it would not seem hard to me. But to toil and drudge in order

that I may prolong my lonely life, and with no other end or aim——!"

To Mrs. Jerningham she made no piteous confession of her own sadness. It was agreed between them that she was to be a governess. Mrs. Jerningham's influence would be invaluable in procuring her a situation; and all she had to to do was to make herself mistress of the accomplishments which that lady assured her were indispensable. Some of these accomplishments she had already mastered; of others she had a superficial knowledge. Nothing was required but a little patient drudgery; two or three hours a day devoted to the piano, an hour or so to her German grammar. And in the evening she could read *I Promessi Sposi* to her kind patroness, by way of polishing her Italian.

"You shall stay with us till we have made you a perfect treasure in the way of governesses," Emily said, kindly, "and then Auntie and I will take pains to get you a situation with nice people, who will give you seventy or eighty pounds a year, and with whom you may be as happy as the day is long; and I am sure that will be better than your dreadful country theatres.

Lucy assented to this proposition; but she thought, with a sigh, of Market Deeping, and her brief triumphs as Pauline. Yes, the dramatic profession was no doubt a hard one, but she had been happy at Market Deeping; and that one night of glory, when she had been called before the curtain after her performance of Pauline, had been a dazzling glimpse of brightness which shone back upon her through the mists of the past with supernal radiance. And instead of such bright brief successes, she was to teach those hideous German declensions, and read *I Promessi Sposi*, and superintend the performance of Cramer's Exercises, for ever and ever. For ever and ever! She was but just nineteen, and the long blank life before her looked like an eternity.

Her chief consolation during the patient, laborious days was the thought that Mr. Desmond would approve her efforts; her secondary motive was the desire to be duly grateful for Mrs. Jerningham's kindness. Nor were her days all drudgery. Her patroness was too kind to allow this. There were long drives through the bright pastoral landscape that lies around sleepy, river-side Hampton; a little, very little, quiet society; an occasional novel; and a rare—ah, too rare—visit from the editor of the *Areopagus*.

The relations existing between that gentleman and Mrs. Jerningham were quite beyond poor inexperienced Lucy's comprehension, and they formed the subject of her wondering meditations.

Between Mr. Desmond and Mrs. Jerningham there was no tie of kindred—*that* fact had long ago transpired; nor could Mr. Desmond be affianced to a lady whose husband's existence was a notorious fact. And yet Mr. Desmond was obviously the especial property, the moral goods and chattels, of Mrs. Jerningham. Miss Alford knew something of Plato, but very little of that figment of the modern brain, entitled Platonic attachment. Friendship between these two persons would in no manner have surprised her; but, innocent as she was, her instinct told her that in this association there was something more than common friendship. If she had been blind to every subtle shade of tone and manner that prevailed between these two, she would have perceived the one fact, that Mr. Desmond's manner to herself in Emily's presence was not what it had been in the Islington lodging-house, where he had first come to her relief. The tender, half-fatherly familiarity was exchanged for a ceremonious courtesy that chilled her to the heart. Beyond a few kind but measured sentences of inquiry or solicitude when he first saw her, he scarcely addressed her at all during his visits of many hours. She sat far away from the chess-table or the reading-desk by which Emily's low easy-chair was placed, and the subdued murmur of the two voices only came to her at intervals from the spot where Mrs. Jerningham and her guest conversed.

At dinner Mr. Desmond's talk was of that western London, which was stranger to her than Egypt or Babylon; the music which Mrs. Jerningham played after dinner was from modern operas, whose every note was familiar to those two, but of which she knew no more than the names. The books, the people, the places they talked of were all alike strange to her. She was with them, but not of them. The sense of her strangeness and loneliness weighed upon her like a physical oppression. Every day of Mr. Desmond's absence she found herself thinking of—nay, even hoping for—his coming; and when he came she was miserable, and felt her solitary, hopeless position more keenly than in his absence.

"Oh, why did I ever see him?" she asked herself. "I should have struggled on, somehow, at such places as Market Deeping, and might in the end have succeeded in my profession. And now I have given up all my hopes to please him—and he does not care! What can it matter to him whether I am an actress or a governess? I am nothing to *him*."

He does not care! This was the note, the dominant of all Miss Alford's sad reveries. She toiled on patiently, always anxious to please her patroness; but it seemed to her very hard that in gaining this new friend, she should have so utterly lost that old sweet friendship which had begun in the days when she

wore holland pinafores, and fished for bream and barbel with a wretched worm impaled upon a crooked pin.

Once, when her sad thoughts were saddest, a faint sigh escaped her lips as she bent over her work, in her accustomed seat by one of the windows, remote from the spot affected by Mrs. Jerningham; and, looking up some minutes afterwards, she saw Laurence Desmond's eyes fixed upon her, with a look that penetrated her heart. Ah, what did it mean, that tender, deeply-mournful look? This inexperienced girl dared not trust her own translation of its meaning. But that sad regard touched her heart with a new feeling.

"He thinks of me; he is sorry for me," she said to herself More than this she dared not hope; but in her dreams that night, and in her thoughts and dreams of many days and nights to come, the look was destined to haunt her. In the next minute she heard Mrs. Jerningham announce her desire for a game of chess, with the tone of an extremely proper Cleopatra to an unmartial Antony.

The weeks and months went by, and Mrs. Jerningham was still a kind and hospitable friend to the helpless girl whom Mr. Desmond had cast upon her compassion.

"I am very glad you introduced her to me," Emily said sometimes to the editor of the *Areopagus*. "She is really a dear little thing; and I am growing quite attached to her."

"Yes, she is a good little girl," replied Mr. Desmond, in a careless tone.

"And as to jealousy," resumed Emily, "of course that is quite out of the question with such a dear, harmless little creature."

"Of course."

And then Mrs. Jerningham looked at Mr. Desmond, and Mr. Desmond looked at Mrs. Jerningham, with the air of accomplished swordsmen on guard.

Was Mrs. Jerningham jealous of this "dear, harmless little creature?" She watched Miss Lucy very closely when Laurence was present, and had a sharp eye for Laurence when he gave Miss Lucy good-day; but if she had been jealous, she would scarcely have kept Lucy at the villa, where Laurence saw her very often; on the other hand, if Lucy had not been at the villa, Laurence might have seen her even more often, and Mrs. Jerningham could not have been present at their meetings; so there may have been some alloy of self-interest mingled with the pure gold of womanly kindness.

The spring ripened into early summer, and the Hampton villa looked its brightest; but neither spring nor summer saw the end of Emily Jerningham's family cough. She insisted upon making light of the matter, and as, unhappily, those about

her were inexperienced in illness, the slight but perpetual cough gave little uneasiness. Before Laurence she made a point of appearing at her best. Excitement gave colour to her cheeks and light to her eyes. The outline of her patrician face was little impaired by some loss of roundness, and her elegant demi-toilettes concealed the fact that she was growing alarmingly thin. Her maid alone knew the extent of the change, which she and the housekeeper discussed, with much solemn foreboding of coming ill.

"I had to line the sleeves of her last dress with wadding," said the abigail; "such a beautiful arm she had, too, when I first came to her; but she's been going off gradual-like for the last three years, poor thing! and as to talking to her about her 'ealth, it would be as much as my place is worth, for a prouder lady, nor a more reserved in her ways, I never lived with. You might as well stand behind a statue, and brush *its* hair, till you're ready to drop, for anything like conversation you can get out of *her;* and when I think of my last lady—which was a countess, as you know, Wilcox, and the things *she'd* tell me, and the way she loved a bit of gossip—it turns my blood to ice like to wait upon Mrs. Jerningham. And yet as generous a lady as ever I served; and as kind and civil-spoken, in her own cold way."

Mrs. Jerningham paid several visits to Dr. Leonards; but as she obstinately or apathetically ignored that distinguished physician's counsels, she was no better for those drives to Great George Street.

Laurence questioned her closely as to these interviews, and would fain have questioned Dr. Leonards himself, had his position authorized him to do so.

Lucy, who knew absolutely nothing of illness, believed her kind patroness's cough to be the merest nervous irritation of the throat; nor was Mrs. Colton in any manner alarmed. No one but Mrs. Jerningham herself knew of her feverish nights, and daily hours of suffering and languor, endured in the solitude of her pretty morning-room. Even the patient herself had no apprehension of danger. The languor had crept upon her by such slow degrees, the fever had so long been a chronic disorder.

"If I were happy, I should soon be well, I dare say," she said to herself; "the fever and the weakness are of the mind rather than the body."

In the first week of summer Mr. Desmond gave himself a brief respite from the cares of the *Areopagus*, and secured bachelor lodgings at Sunbury, where he kept his boat, and whence he rowed to and from River Lawn.

"And this week you are really going to give to me?" said Mrs. Jerningham.

"To you and to Father Thames. I hope you are as fond of the river as you were last summer."

"Oh yes. The river has been my companion upon many a lonely summer day. I have reason to be fond of the river."

She glanced with something of sadness to her favourite seat under the drooping boughs of a Spanish chestnut. Her summer days had been very lonely, lacking all those elements which make the lives of women sweet and happy. For her had been no murmur of children's voices, no pleasant cares of household, no daily expectation of a husband's return from club or senate, office or counting-house; no weekly round of visits among the poor; no sense of duty done; only a dull, listless blank, and the last new novel, and the last new colour in *gros de Lyons*, and the last new monster in scentless, gaudy horticulture, a chocolate-coloured calceolaria, a black dahlia, a sea-green camellia japonica.

"You are going to give me the whole week," she said. "Oh, Laurence, I will try to be happy!"

She said this with unwonted earnestness, and with eyes that were dim with unshed tears. And she kept her word. She did honestly try to be happy, and she succeeded in being—gay. If the gaiety were somewhat feverish, if her harmonious laugh bordered on that laughter whereof Solomon said "it was mad," she did for the moment contrive to escape thought. This was something, for of late, thought had been only another name for care.

Mr. Desmond had rowed stroke in the University Eight, and shared the Oxonian fallacy that to scull from ten to twenty miles under a broiling sun is the intellectual man's best repose. He rested his brain from the labours of the *Areopagus*, and spent his days in pulling a roomy wherry to and fro between Hampton and Maidenhead, with Mrs. Jerningham and Lucy Alford for his passengers, and a dainty little hamper of luncheon for his cargo.

The weather was lovely. The landscape through which the river winds between Hampton and Chertsey, between Chertsey and Maidenhead, is a kind of terrestrial paradise, and a paradise peopled with classic shades; and all along those pastoral, villa-dotted banks, nestled little villages and trimly-furnished inns, within whose hospitable shade the wanderers might repose, while the smart, maple-painted boat bobbed up and down at anchor in the sun. These peaceful rovers kept no count of the hours. They left River Lawn at early morning, lunched among the reedy shores below Chertsey, took their five-o'clock tea at Staines, and went home with the tide to a compound collation, which combined the elements of dinner, tea, and supper.

Mrs. Colton was but too glad to forego the delights of these water-parties in favour of Lucy; nor was Laurence sorry to, resign a passenger who weighed some twelve or thirteen stone

who at every lurch of the boat entertained fears of drowning; to whom every weir seemed perilous as Niagara, and every lock a descent into Hades; and whose shawls and wraps, and carriage-rugs and foot-muffs were insufferable to behold under the summer sun.

To Lucy, the delight of these excursions was a single ineffable pleasure. She knew that this bright, brief existence in *his* company was to occur once in her life, and once only. Again and again she told herself this; but she could not help being dangerously happy. The river, the sunshine, the landscape, the perfumed air that crept over banks of wild-thyme,—for, thank Heaven, in spite of the builder, the wild-thyme does blow on banks we know, not twenty miles from London,—all these things of themselves would have made her happy; but to these things Laurence Desmond's presence, his low, kind voice, his ever-thoughtful care, lent a new sweetness.

In plain truth, this penniless orphan girl had most innocently and unconsciously fallen in love—or learned to love the man who had befriended her. Of that kindly, compassionate assistance which Mr. Desmond had given in all singleness of heart, *this* was the fatal fruit. From the first he had felt a vague consciousness that danger might lurk in this association; but the full extent of that peril he had never foreseen. It was danger to himself he had dreaded. The girl's helplessness had touched him, her gratitude had melted him, her pretty, innocent, almost reverential looks and tones had flattered him.

He knew now that the hazard of his own feelings had been less than the peril of hers. By signs and tokens, too subtle and too delicate for translation into words, the fatal secret had been revealed to him. He knew that he was beloved; that this affectionate, innocent heart was his; that this fresh young life might be taken into his keeping to-morrow, to brighten and bless his own until the end of his earthly pilgrimage. Yes; this dear little creature, with her soft, winning ways, and dove-like eyes, he might have claimed for his wife to-morrow: if he had been free. But on him there was a tie more binding than marriage; a chain that no divorce could break—the bondage of his honour. As Lancelot sadly bade farewell to the lily maid of Astolat, so Laurence, in the silence of his heart, put away from him the dream and the hope that he would fain have cherished.

And all the time he thought of his bondage, the oars dipped gaily into the water, and the editor and Mrs. Jerningham talked of literature and art, and fashion and horticulture; and Lucy was satisfied with the delight of hearing that one dear voice which made the most commonplace conversation a kind of poetry. There are no limits to the sentimentality of inexperienced girlhood. Young ladies in society had calculated Mr. Desmond's

income to a sixpence, and had assessed all the advantages of his position, his chances of a seat in Parliament by and by, with every remote contingency of his career. But if he had indeed been Lancelot, and herself Elaine the fair, Lucy Alford could scarcely have regarded him with more reverent affection. And all this he had won for himself by a little Christianlike compassion, and an expenditure of something under fifty pounds.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"COULD LOVE PART THUS?"

THE happy week went by, and at the close of it came the end of the world, as it seemed to Lucy Alford.

"Good news, Lucy!" Mrs. Jerningham said, one morning as she opened her letters at the breakfast-table; "good news for you."

"For *me*," faltered Miss Alford, blushing; "what good news can there be for me?"

What indeed? Was not Laurence Desmond's holiday to end to-morrow? This afternoon they were to have their last row on the Thames.

"Yes, Lucy. You remember what I told you about Mrs. Fitzpatrick, that delightful person in Ireland. I wrote to her a few days ago, you know, telling her of my plans for you,—for she is just one of those good, motherly creatures who are always ready to help one,—and it happens most fortunately that she can take you herself. Her own governess—a young person who had been with her five years—has lately married, and she has tried in vain to find any one she likes. You are to go to her at once, dear, with a salary of sixty pounds. The situation will be a delightful one, you will be quite one of the family, and they live in a noble old stone house, in a great wilderness of a park, only fifteen miles from Limerick."

"Only fifteen miles from Limerick." If the noble old stone house had been fifteen miles from Memphis, or fifteen miles from Timbuctoo, the name of the locality could scarcely have conjured up more dreary ideas in the mind of Lucy Alford. She involuntarily made a rough calculation of the mileage between Limerick and Mr. Desmond's chambers. *Him* she could never hope to see again, if she went to those unknown wilds of Ireland. And yet what did it matter? A world seemed to divide them, as it was. Sitting in the same boat with him, the abyss that yawned between them was profound and immeasurable as eternity. At Limerick or at Hampton it must be all the same. He was nothing to her at Hampton; at Limerick he could be no less than nothing. Something in her face, as she mused thus, told Mrs. Jerningham that the delight afforded by these tidings was not altogether unalloyed.

"I dare say the notion of such a journey alarms you," said Emily kindly; "but I will see that all is arranged for your comfort. And I am sure you will be happy at Shannondale Park. I could not have wished you better fortune than such a home."

No: what could fortune give her brighter than this? A pleasant home and a kind mistress. She felt like some poor little slave sold to a new master, to be sent to a strange country. She tried with a great effort to express some sense of pleasure and thankfulness, but she could not. The words choked her. Happy, in barbarous wastes of unknown Hibernia, while *he* lived his own life in London, serenely forgetful of her wretched existence!

"Oh, how ungrateful I am!" she said to herself, while Mrs. Jerningham watched her sharply, and guessed what thoughts were working in that sorely troubled brain.

"Perhaps a situation nearer London would have suited you better, Miss Alford," Emily remarked, with biting acrimony; "where your *old friends* could have called upon you from time to time."

Lucy flushed burning red, and anon burst into tears.

"I have no friend in the world but you," she said, piteously. "I know it is wicked of me not to be pleased with such good fortune, and I—am—truly—ger—ger—grateful to you, dear Mrs. Jerningham; but Ireland seems so *very* far away."

The piteous look subdued Emily's sternness. She took the girl's hand in her own tenderly.

"Yes, it *seems* far away," she said, cheerfully; "but I know you will be happy there. You cannot imagine anything more beautiful than the river Shannon."

Lucy thought of Father Thames and his dipping willows, and *his* grave face, sadly regardful of her in the pauses of his talk. She thought of these things, and shook her head. Ah, no it was impossible; for *her*, Shannon could never be what Thames had been. Mrs. Jerningham comforted her in a grand, patronizing manner, and promised her unbounded happiness—on the banks of the Shannon.

"You do not know what the Irish are," she exclaimed; "so kind, so hearty, so genial. With them a governess is received as one of the family. The children love her, and cling to her as if she were an elder sister. And the Fitzpatricks are of the *vieille roche*, you know; you will find no parvenu gentility there."

Yes, the picture was a fair one; but, for lack of one feature, it seemed cold and dreary to Lucy Alford. She managed, however, to appear contented, and thanked Mrs. Jerningham prettily for the kindness which had procured her this distant home. After this, Emily went out alone to her garden and hot-houses, to inspect the latest ugliness in calceolarias; and Mrs. Colton

held her morning conference with the housekeeper, and received a solemn embassy from the kitchen-garden and forcing-houses. Lucy sat listlessly in the drawing-room, meditating upon the new estate of life to which it had pleased Mrs. Jerningham, under Providence, to call her; while Mrs. Jerningham went to see the new calceolaria, and to reflect at ease upon her late interview with Lucy.

"There isn't one of 'm out as deep a colour as this here, mum," said the gardener; "and if I can get the slips to strike—as I believe I shall—we shall have a rare show of 'em."

"Poor little thing, how she loves him!" thought Mrs. Jerningham. "But in a new country, among new faces, she will soon forget all that."

"They strikes a deep root, you see, mum, when they do strike—these young plants. They send their suckers down into the earth, and you'd find it hard work to uproot 'em."

"A girl of that age is always falling in love," continued Mrs. Jerningham. "It 's a mere overflow of juvenile sentimentality, and never lasts very long."

And then, having stared at the flowers in the hot-house with absent, unseeing eyes, she would fain have departed; but the gardener stopped her with a request for permission to order more manure.

"We shall want a few loads more, mum," he said, in his most insinuating tone; "I don't like to be allus askin'—which I know it *do* look like that—but I know as you wish a show made with these here calceolaries; and these young plants require a deal o' manure. And then there 's the melons, mum; there ain't a plant going like melons for sucking the goodness out of manure—they 're a regular greedy lot, melons—as you may say, mum; and there ain't no satisfyin' 'em. But, you see, I turns it all into the ground afterwards, mum, and you gets the good out of it next year, in your sea-kale."

Mrs. Jerningham gave her consent for the ordering of the manure, though she had a dim idea that in the matter of manure she was marked as the victim of extortion. She looked about her as she went slowly back to her favourite green walk by the river. She looked at the forcing-pits and hot-houses, the perfectly-trained wall-fruit—which might have shown beside the symmetrical pears and plum-trees of Frogmore—and she reflected how much they had cost, and how little happiness they had given her.

"One cannot force happiness," she said to herself. "Or if one does, it is like the peaches we ripen in February—almost flavourless."

She went down to the green, sheltered walk, where the low plashing murmur of the river seldom failed to tranquillize her

spirits. Here she could think quietly of the one subject which was all-important to her anxious mind. That Lucy Alford loved Laurence Desmond she was fully assured: *that* point she had long settled for herself. The one portentous question yet unanswered was, whether Laurence loved Lucy. Mrs. Jerningham had watched the two closely, and she suspected Laurence with a direful suspicion, but she could not be sure that he had merited her doubts.

"If I thought that he loved her, I would end this miserable farce at once," she said to herself, "and set him free. How many times I have offered him his freedom! And he has refused it, and assured me—in his cold, measured, *friendly* way—of his unchanging constancy. Hypocrite!" she muttered, between her clenched teeth.

And then there came upon her an awful yearning for some death-dealing weapon, with which, at one fell swoop, she might annihilate the man she loved.

"Oh, how dearly I loved him," she thought; "how dearly I loved him! How I used to yearn for his coming; how willingly I would have endured poverty and trouble for his sake—in those old happy days when I was free to be his wife! And he waited till his income should be large enough for a suitable establishment, and let another man marry me!"

Did Laurence love Lucy? That was the question which Mrs. Jerningham would fain have solved. But to send Lucy to Ireland was scarcely the way to arrive at a solution. It was rather like begging the question.

"She will tell him she is going, directly she sees him," said Mrs. Jerningham; "and he must be a consummate hypocrite if his manner then does not betray him."

Laurence was expected at noon that day—in half an hour. He was to come from Sunbury in his boat, to take the two ladies on their last excursion. Emily determined upon lying in wait for him, in order to be present at his meeting with Miss Alford.

"I must see the first effect of the news," she thought.

She paced slowly up and down the walk. As twelve o'clock struck from Hampton church, the boat's keel ground against the iron steps. Laurence tied her to the landing-stage, and came bounding on to the green walk, at the extreme end of which Mrs. Jerningham stood watching him. He did not glance in her direction, but walked across the lawn to the drawing-room, where he was accustomed to find the mistress of the house, and went in through a fernery.

Emily followed swiftly. She was so eager to perceive the effect of those tidings which must needs be so important to Laurence, if he were indeed the traitor she half-believed him to be. At the glass-door between the fernery and the drawing-

room she stopped. She was too late. The news had been told already. For one moment she deliberated, and in the next, as far as feminine honour goes, was lost. Laurence was speaking. She did not want to interrupt him. She wanted to hear what he said; so she drew back a little, behind the shelter of a gigantic Australian fern, and watched him, and heard him, from that convenient covert.

"To Ireland?" he said, gravely; "and do you like going to Ireland, Miss Alford?"

This was very proper; this was as it should be, thought Mrs. Jerningham,—a cold, measured, guardian-like tone, expressive of a gentleman-like and Christian-like concern in the young lady's welfare; no more. Emily breathed more freely.

"Ye—yes," faltered Lucy; "I—I—I am very grateful to Mrs. Jerningham for her kindness in procuring me such a happy home; only—only I——"

"Only what, Lucy?"

Good heavens! what a sudden change of tone! No longer measured and gentlemanlike, but full of a tender eagerness—a fond concern, that went through Mrs. Jerningham's heart like a dagger.

"Only I—oh, it is very wicked of me to be discontented—only—Ireland is so very, very far away from all the people I ever knew; and every friend—and—from YOU!"

And here she broke down, as she had broken down upon a previous occasion, and burst into tears.

In the next moment she was clasped in Laurence Desmond's arms. The Australian fern was shaken as by a sudden tempest—ah, what a tempest of passion, and grief, and jealousy, and despair raged in the heart of her whose trembling caused those leaves to shake!

"Lucy!" cried Laurence, passionately, "you must not—you must not! I cannot see you cry. It is not the first time. Once before you tortured me like this; and I held my tongue. I *could* keep silence then; but I can't to-day. I did not love you then as I do now—my pet, my dear love. Send you to Ireland! Oh, how cruel!—my tender one alone among strangers! My dearest, for months I have held myself aloof from you; I have forbidden my eyes to look at you; and now, after all my struggles, after all my victories, I break down at last. I love you—I love you!"

He kissed her—the fair young brow, the eyelids wet with tears. Mrs. Jerningham heard that unmistakeable sound, as of song-birds in an aviary; and if a wish could kill, there would have been a swift and sudden foreclosure of two fair lives.

"*You*—YOU love me!" faltered Lucy, in a whisper.

It was too sweet. Ah, yes; a brief delicious dream, no doubt, thought Miss Alford.

"Yes, dear, with all my heart I love you," answered Laurence Desmond, putting her suddenly away from him, with a solemn gesture symbolical of eternal divorcement. "I love you, my dearest and best; but you and I can never be more to each other than we have been—never again so much; for at least we have been together—and for me even *that* happiness must never be again."

Lucy looked at him wonderingly, but she did not speak. She was overcome by the one stupendous fact of Laurence Desmond's confession. He loved her! After this the deluge. If the peaceful rippling river had arisen, mighty as old Nile, to sweep all the villas of Hampton to the distant sea, she would have submitted to the swift destruction, and have deemed herself sufficiently blest in having lived to hear what she had heard. This is how girlhood loves. Unhappily, or it may be happily, such love as this—simple, single, passionate as its sister poetry—perishes with girlhood. The woman's Love is a compound of many passions, claims cousinship with Pride and Self-esteem, and owns an ugly half-sister called, by her friends, Prudence, by her foes, Calculation.

"My dear, I love you," continued Laurence with gentle gravity, and with the air of a man who has resolved on a full confession. "When first your father called me to your aid, I came, pleased at the idea of serving an old friend, but with the vaguest possible recollection of the pretty little girl I had seen running after butterflies at Henley. I came, and I found my little butterfly-huntress transformed into a fair and loving creature, whose unselfish nature was revealed in every look and thought. For a long time I had no thought, no consciousness of such a thought, except the honest desire to help you, to the best of my power, in the difficult career you had chosen for yourself. How shall I tell you at what moment this friendly interest grew into a warmer feeling, when I cannot explain the change to myself? I only know that I love you; and that if I were free, as I am not, I should sigh for no sweeter home than one to which you would welcome me."

For a few moments he paused, looking fondly at the sweet blushing face, downcast eyelids heavy with tears, and then went on steadily:

"I am not free, Lucy; I am bound hand and foot by the fetters I forged for myself some years ago; and I think, as I have told you one-half of the truth, it will be wisest to tell you the other half. Ten years ago I very dearly loved a young lady, as beautiful, as amiable as yourself, like yourself the only daughter of a gentleman in reduced circumstances, but not subjected to the trials which you have borne so nobly. I loved her dearly and truly; but I was a man of the world, a haunter

of clubs, a little sceptical on the subject of feminine fortitude and feminine reasonableness; and I told myself that, in order to insure this young lady's happiness and my own, I must first secure an income which would enable us to be dwellers within the pale of society. I had been taught that, on the outermost side of that impalpable, conventional boundary, domestic happiness for people of gentle rearing was impossible. It was not enough that I loved her; it was not enough that I believed myself beloved; something more than this was necessary—a brougham, a house in that border-land of Pimlico which courtesy can call Belgravia, and a fair allowance for the expenses of my wife's toilette. Ah, Lucy, you can never imagine what ghostly shadows of flounced petticoats and voluminous silken trains arose between me and the image of the girl I loved, and waved me back, and made a phantasmal barrier between us! If you marry her, said Prudence, you must pay for those. *I will* marry her, I answered, when I feel myself strong enough to cope with her milliner's bill." He laughed a short bitter laugh.

"Lucy," he cried, "I think if I had not loved you for myself, I should have loved you for your simple dresses. I have been so suffocated in our modern atmosphere of luxury—stifled with the odour of Ess. Bouquet, snowed-up in silks and laces, and soft-scented plumes, and the faint perfume of sandal-wood fans, and the crush and crowd of modern fashion—that to find a woman who could be pretty without the aid of Truefitt, and could charm without the art of Descou, was piquant as a discovery; but I will not stop to speak of these things. While I waited, the woman whom I dearly loved married another man, older by many years than herself, in every way unsuited to her. Within a year of her marriage I met her unexpectedly, and her face told me that I was not quite forgotten. After that meeting, fate threw us much together; and oh, Lucy, now I come to the hard part of my confession! Her husband trusted me, and I wronged him; by no act which the world calls guilt, but by a sentimental flirtation, licensed by the world so long as it is unprotested against by the husband. It was pleasant to us to meet, and we met; it was pleasant to her to read the books I recommended, to sing the songs I chose for her. Among the costlier gifts of her husband, her morning-room was sometimes adorned with a rustic basket of hot-house flowers from me. At the Opera, in picture-galleries, in her own house, we met, week after week, month after month. No friendship was ever more intellectual; nothing within the meaning of the word flirtation was ever less guilty. By and by I wrote to her—letters about art, about books, about music, about the gossip of the world in which we lived, with here and there a half-expressed regret for

my own broken life or her uncongenial marriage. Love-letters in the common sense of the word they were not; but letters so long and so frequent might, if received by her at her own house, have attracted attention; so they were directed to a neighbouring post-office. *That*, Lucy, was our worst guilt; and it wrecked us. One day the letters were found, and the husband tacitly signed his wife's condemnation without having troubled himself so much as to read the evidence against her. From that hour my life was devoted to the woman who had suffered by my selfishness and folly; from that hour to this we have been friends in the fullest sense of the word, and friends only. If ever the day of her freedom comes, I shall claim her as my wife; if it should never come, I shall go to my grave unmarried. And now, Lucy, you know all; you know that I love you; and you know why I have fought a hard fight against my love, and am angry with myself for being betrayed into this confession."

"It was all my fault," sobbed Lucy, who was ever ready to cry *mea culpa;* "I had no right to tell you I was sorry to go to Ireland. But oh, Mr. Desmond, forget that you have ever spoken to me, and be true to the lady you loved so dearly, long ago! If it is hard for me to lose you, it would be harder for her. I will go to Ireland; I will try to do my duty; I will try to be happy. You have been so kind to me—and—Mrs. Jerningham—has been so kind too; I am grateful to you both; and when I am far away, I shall think of you both with love and gratitude, and pray for your happiness every day of my life."

She had been quick to identify that lady whom Laurence had so carefully avoided naming; she understood now, for the first time, the nature of the tie that bound him to Mrs. Jerningham.

"I am to go to Ireland in a very few days," she said, after a brief pause, during which Laurence Desmond sat motionless, his face hidden by his hand; "I will say good-bye at once. I shall see you again, of course—but not alone. Good-bye—and thank you a thousand, thousand times for all your goodness to me and to my father."

She held out her hands, but he did not see them.

"Good-bye! God bless you, darling!" he said, in a broken voice, and in the next moment Lucy Alford left the room.

Mr. Desmond sighed, a heavy sigh; and when he removed his hand from before his face, that pale watcher behind the fern saw that his cheeks were wet with tears. For some minutes—slow, painful minutes to the watcher—he sat meditating gloomily; and then he too departed, with a listless step, by one of the windows opening on the lawn.

"O God!" thought the watcher, who had sunk back helpless, motionless, against the angle of the wall, "am *I* the only wretch upon earth? These two think it very little to sacrifice them-

selves for me; and yet I cannot let him go—I cannot let him go."

She came from her lurking-place into the drawing-room, and seated herself by the table at which Laurence had been sitting; and here she sat with hands clasped before her face, thinking of what she had heard. Unspeakable had been the pain of that revelation; but the blow had not been unexpected. For some time she had suspected Laurence Desmond's regard for Lucy; for a very long time she had perceived the decline of his affection for herself.

"It is my own fault," she thought; "I harassed and worried him with my wicked jealousy. I made myself a perpetual care and trouble to him: can I wonder that I lost his love? Oh, if I could learn to be generous, if I could be only reasonable and just, if I could let him go! But I cannot, I cannot!"

No, indeed: she had made Laurence Desmond a part of herself, the very first principle of her existence; and to resign her hold upon him was to make an end of the sole aim and object of her life. For him she had lived, and for none other. The two commandments of the Gospel were to her much less than this man. Her love for her God began and ended with a tolerably punctual attendance at the parish church, and a half-mechanical utterance of the responses to the orthodox family prayers which Mrs. Colton read every morning and evening to the little household of River Lawn. Her love for her neighbour was summed up in a careless compliance with any parochial demand on her purse. All the rest was Laurence Desmond. And now Conscience told her she must give him up. She sat thinking, with tearless eyes and a pale, still face, until the subject of her thoughts came to the open window, and told her that the boat was ready

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SUMMER STORM.

Mrs. Colton entered the drawing-room by the door as Laurence Desmond came in by the window. "I have given you the sparkling Rüdesheimer instead of champagne, Mr. Desmond," she said, cheerily: "Donner has put it in a basket of rough ice; and Vokes has brought me in the finest peaches I have seen this year, Emily. He is quite proud of them."

After this came Lucy, pale and grave, but looking the picture of innocence and prettiness, in her white dress, and little sailor hat with ribbon of Oxford blue.

"Not dressed, Emily!" exclaimed Laurence, as he shook hands with Mrs. Jerningham.

The exclamation was purely mechanical. His mind must

indeed have been pre-occupied, or he would have noticed the icy coldness of the hand that lay so listlessly in his own.

"I have only my hat to put on. Wilson has seen to the shawls and cloaks, no doubt. I am quite ready."

Mrs. Jerningham took her hat from the sofa, where she had thrown it an hour before; a very archetype of hats, bordered with the lustrous plumage of a peacock's breast. Of these glories she had tasted to satiety; all the bliss that millinery can give to the heart of woman had been hers. But there comes a time when even these things seem vanity. To-day the peacock's plumage might have been dust and ashes, for any pleasure it afforded her.

They went out to the boat. The day was warm to oppressiveness, and Mrs. Jerningham's attire of the thinnest.

"I hope you have plenty of wraps," said Laurence; "there's rather an ugly cloud to windward."

"Oh yes; Wilson always gives us an infinity of that kind of thing," Mrs. Jerningham answered, glancing at the bottom of the boat, where lay a heap of shawls and cloaks of the burnous order, just a little less gauzy in texture than the dresses of the two ladies.

"I really am almost afraid of the day," muttered Laurence, looking to the south-west, where a stormy darkness brooded over the landscape.

"I am not afraid," replied Emily; "it is to be our last day, remember, Laurence. Let us have our last day together."

Something in her tone startled and touched him. He looked at her earnestly, but the proud face gave no sign.

"It shall be as you please," he said; "but I must not forget that you are not out of the hands of Dr. Leonards, and you have told me he enjoined you to be careful."

"Oh yes; a physician always says that when he can find nothing else to say."

There was a little more discussion, and presently the boat shot away, swift as a dart, with the strong sweep of the sculls. They were to land at Chertsey, picnic at St. Ann's Hill, and come home to Hampton in the evening. Laurence Desmond had the proprietorial mandate in his pocket, that for him and his friends the gates of St. Ann's should be opened.

Only a few big, splashing drops of rain overtook them between Hampton and Chertsey, and when they landed, the stormy darkness seemed to have vanished from the south-western horizon. Mr. Desmond had made all his arrangements; a fly was in waiting, and in half an hour the little party were wandering in the groves which have been sanctified to history by the fame of Fox.

The picnic was to all appearance a success. The almost

feverish gaiety which had distinguished Emily Jerningham of late was especially noticeable in her manner to-day. *Carpe diem* was the philosophy which sustained her in this bitter crisis. This last day would she snatch. It was her festive supper on the eve of execution. Like that bright band whose laughter echoed in Trophonian caves of grim Bastille, before the dawn that was to witness their slaughter, did Emily Jerningham pour out the sparkling vintage of the Rhineland as a libation upon that altar where she was so soon to sacrifice her selfish love.

The western sky was dark and louring when the revellers left the groves of St. Ann, and were driven back to the boat-builder's yard, where they had landed.

"I really think it might be better to go back by road," Laurence said, doubtfully, as he looked at the cloudy horizon. Six o'clock chimed from the tower of Chertsey Church as he spoke. "It will be nearly nine o'clock before I can get you home, you see," he added; "and if there should be rain——"

"We will endure it without a murmur," interposed Emily. "I am bent on going back by water."

"Would Dr. Leonards approve?"

"I will not hold my life on such terms as Dr. Leonards would dictate. We shall have moonlight before we reach Hampton. Come, Laurence, I am quite ready."

Mr. Desmond submitted, and placed his fair companions in the boat with all due care. Then, after the preliminary pushing off, the oars dipped softly in the water, and the boat sped homewards.

Mrs. Jerningham's gaiety left her with a strange abruptness. She leant back against the cushioned rail of the boat, silent and thoughtful, and with fixed, dreamy eyes.

"You are tired, I fear," Laurence remarked by and by, wondering at her silence.

"Yes; I am a little tired."

It would seem as if Lucy too were tired, for she also was silent, and sat watching the changing landscape with a thoughtful gaze. But upon her silence Laurence Desmond made no remark. She had, indeed, been silent and thoughtful all the day, and yet not unhappy. Unhappy!—he loved her! She had been telling herself that fact over and over again, with ever-delightful iteration. He loved her! To know that it was so constituted an all-sufficient happiness.

The water-journey with one pair of sculls between Chertsey and Hampton is a long one, and many are the locks which arrest the swift progress of the voyager, and often echoes the cry of "Lo-o-óck!" over the quiet waters; but so bright and changing is the landscape, so soothing the influence of the

atmosphere, that the voyager must be dull indeed who finds the way too long.

The changing banks shifted past Mrs. Jerningham like pictures in a dream. A profound silence had fallen upon the boat. The rower dipped his oars with a measured mechanical motion, and his grave face might have been the countenance of Charon himself, conveying a boatload of shadows to the Rhadamanthine shore. To Emily it seemed as if they were indeed voyagers on some mystic, symbolical river, rather than on the friendly breast of Thames. The end of her life had come. What had she to do but die? All that she held dear—the one sustaining influence of her weak soul, the very keystone of the edifice of her life—this she was to lose. And what then?

Beyond this point she could not look. That a dismal duty, a bitter sacrificial act, must be performed be her, she knew. But that by the doing of that act she might possibly attain peace, consolation, release from a long and harassing bondage, she could not foresee.

"I will give him up," she said to herself; "soon—to-night. It is like the bitter medicine they made me take sometimes when I was a child. I cannot take it too soon."

And then she looked at Lucy, and her lip curled ever so little as she scrutinized the fair but not altogether perfect face.

She measured her charms against those of her happier rival, and told herself that all the advantage was on her own side. And yet, and yet—this fair-faced girl was dearer to him, by an infinite degree, than she who had loved him so many years.

While silence still held the voyagers as by a spell, the rain came splashing heavily down, and the perils of the journey began. They had not yet reached Sunbury, and some miles of winding water lay between them and Hampton.

"I am afraid we are in for it," Laurence said. "We had better land at Sunbury, and get back in a fly."

Mrs. Jerningham was opposed to this. She declared that she had not the slightest objection to the rain: she was wrapped up to an absurd degree; and she drew her gauzy burnous round her in evidence of the fact, while Lucy adjusted a second cloak of thin scarlet fabric over the gauzy white burnous. Laurence, however, insisted on landing, and did his utmost to procure a vehicle; while the two ladies shivered in a chilly inn parlour, their garments already damp with the heavy rain. He came back to them in despair. No fly was to be had at Sunbury for love or money. There was a Volunteer ball at Chertsey that very evening, and every vehicle was engaged.

"I had much rather go back in the boat," said Emily.

"But the doctor said you were to be so careful," suggested Lucy.

"I do not believe in the doctor. Come, Laurence, it is better to encounter another shower than to wait shivering here for unattainable flies."

To this Mr. Desmond unwillingly assented. There was a pause in the summer storm—a faint glimmer of watery sunlight low in the cloudy west. The boat seemed the only possible means of getting home.

"If you would stay here all night," he suggested, "it would be better than running any risk."

"I could not exist a night in a strange hotel," replied Mrs. Jerningham, glancing round the bare, bleak-looking room, with a shudder. "Please take us home, Mr. Desmond, if you are not afraid of the rain yourself."

There seemed no alternative; so Laurence assented to an immediate return to the boat, comforting himself with the hope that the gleam of sunlight was the harbinger of a fine evening. He insisted, however, upon borrowing a thick shawl and a railway rug from the landlady at Sunbury, in case of the worst.

For half a mile the faint streak of sunshine lighted the voyagers, and then the worst came; the floodgates of the sky were opened, and a summer deluge descended upon the quiet river. Mr. Desmond packed his two charges in the borrowed wraps, and sculled with a desperate vigour.

"It's most unlucky," he said; "there's nothing for it between this and home."

The rain fell in torrents and without ceasing, until the lights of Hampton shone upon them, blotted and blurred by the storm. Long peals of thunder grumbled in the distance; vivid lightnings lit the pale faces of the women; while Mr. Desmond pulled steadily on, lifting the boat over a broad sweep of water with every swoop of the sculls.

One of the voyagers in that boat took a kind of pleasure in the storm. To Emily Jerningham this splashing of rain and sonorous pealing of thunder seemed better than the summer twilight, the calm June sky, and glassy water—that outward peace which had so jarred upon the tempest within.

"Oh, if we could go on through storm and rain to the end! if we could drift out of this earthly river into the thick darkness of the great ocean!" she said to herself; "if the tangled skein of life could be severed with one stroke of the witch's scissors! But we have to unravel the skein with our own weary fingers, and lay the threads smoothly out before we dare say our work is done, and lie down beside it to die."

They were at River Lawn by this time, drenched to the skin, despite the borrowed wraps. Mrs. Jerningham's butler was waiting at the top of the landing-stage with umbrellas, and within

there were fires burning and warm garments ready for the drenched travellers. Wilson took forcible possession of her dripping mistress in the hall.

"Oh, mum, with your cough!" she exclaimed, in tones of horror; while Mrs. Colton assisted in drawing off the pulpy mass of limp gauze that had been such airy silken fabric in the morning.

"Never mind my cough, Wilson," said Mrs. Jerningham, impatiently. "Pray see to Lucy, aunt; she was less protected by the railway-rug than I. Good-night, Laurence, since I suppose I shall not be allowed to appear again this evening. Mr. Desmond will stop here to-night of course, aunt; will you see that he has a warm room, and that he drinks brandy-and-water, and that kind of thing? Let me see you to-morrow, please, Laurence; good-night."

After this Mrs. Jerningham consented to be carried off by the devoted Wilson, who did all she could to undo the mischief done by that watery voyage from Sunbury.

More than one dweller beneath the pretty, fantastic roof of that river-side villa lay wakeful and restless throughout the summer night, listening to the pattering of the rain, the sobbing gusts of wind among the trees, and at daybreak the shrill clamour of distant farm-yards. Three there were in that house for whom life's journey seemed to lie through the thick wilderness—a wilderness unlighted by sun, moon, or stars; pathless, painful obscurity.

In the breakfast-room that morning there was no sign of Mrs. Jerningham. Wilson sent to say that her mistress had slept very little, and was altogether too ill to rise; and on this Mrs. Colton repaired to her niece's room, leaving Lucy and Laurence alone together at the breakfast-table, sorely embarrassed to find themselves so left.

Lucy looked down at her plate, and to all appearance became absorbed in a profound meditation upon the pattern of the china. Laurence cut open the *Times*, and made a conventional remark upon the previous night's debate, concerning the subject whereof Lucy knew about as much as she knew of lunar volcanoes.

Mrs. Colton returned very quickly, much alarmed by her niece's condition. She sent a messenger for the local doctor immediately, while Lucy ran away from the breakfast-table to see if she could be of any use to the invalid.

"I trust Emily is not much the worse for last night's business," said Laurence, alarmed by Mrs. Colton's evident anxiety.

"I fear it has done her great harm," replied the matron; "her cough is very trying, and she is in a high fever. I hope Mr. Canterham will come at once."

"I will wait to see him, and then run up to town for Dr. Leonards," said Laurence.

The local doctor came speedily. He looked very grave when he returned from his patient's room. He confessed that there was fever, and some danger of inflammation.

"I will bring down Dr. Leonards," said Laurence.

"I think it would be wise to do so," replied the Hampton surgeon, wondering who this gentleman was who took so decided a part.

Mr. Desmond lost no time in carrying out his intention; and Dr. Leonards arrived at River Lawn at four o'clock that afternoon, accompanied by Laurence, who could not rest in London.

"I warned Mrs. Jerningham of her danger," said the physician, gravely.

"Indeed? I never heard that there was any cause for alarm. Did you make her understand as much?"

"I spoke as plainly as one dares speak to a patient, and I begged her to let me talk to her aunt. But she forbade this, and promised to take all possible care."

"And she has taken no care. Great God, it is a kind of suicide!"

The passionate exclamation startled the doctor, and he looked at Laurence, wondering what relationship he bore to the lady of whom they had been speaking. Laurence saw the wondering look, and divined its meaning.

"I have known Mrs. Jerningham for many years," he said. "Her father was one of my oldest and closest friends. It was at my instigation that she consulted you, but I had no idea there was danger."

There was no more said. Dr. Leonards saw the patient, and conversed with the Hampton surgeon. That there was danger he made no attempt to deny, when closely questioned by Mrs. Colton, who was half distracted by this sudden calamity. He did not indeed say that the case was hopeless, but his manner was by no means hopeful.

"The cough has been obstinately neglected for months," he said; "and the maid tells me there has been frequent spitting of blood."

"And it has all been hidden from me," cried Mrs. Colton; "how cruel—how cruel!"

"Yes, it is sad that there should have been such concealment. I was very angry with the maid; but she told me she dared not disobey her mistress. I cannot conceal from you that there has been great mischief done."

This interview took place in the drawing-room, while Mr. Desmond paced to and fro the lawn outside the open windows, anguish-stricken.

This sudden peril to the woman he had loved—to whom he was so closely bound by a tie so binding, so intangible—came upon him as an overwhelming calamity. A sense of guilt, remorse unspeakable, smote his heart. He had grown weary of his bondage; yet the possibility of his freedom appalled him. There was grief, there was horror in the thought of liberty so regained. In this hour of Emily Jerningham's peril, the man who had loved her forgot everything except that she had been dear to him. The old tenderness was re-awakened in his breast. He forgot her jealousies, her sneers, her caprices, her fretfulness,—everything but the one alarming fact of her illness.

He intercepted Dr. Leonards, and obtained from him a clearer statement than the physician had cared to make to Mrs. Colton. The great man admitted that the symptoms were as bad as they could be.

"I shall see Mrs. Jerningham again to-morrow," he said. "If we can get her safely through this crisis, and send her to a warmer climate for the autumn, we may patch her up. But a permanent cure is quite out of the question; *that* was hopeless from the first."

"From the first? From the time of her first visit to you?"

"Yes."

Laurence went back to London sorely distressed. The remorseful sense of shortcoming that oppresses the mourner in every earthly severance weighed heavily upon him. Few and infrequent had been the reproaches that had escaped his lips; but in his heart he had often rebelled against Emily Jerningham's tyranny. And she had loved him only too dearly; her jealousy, her despotism, had been alike the evidence of that too-exacting affection. Could he be so ungrateful as to revolt against so tender a tyranny, so flattering a despotism?

He had rebelled; he had found his chains almost intolerable; and he could not forgive himself this secret treason.

For a fortnight he went to and fro between London and River Lawn, neglecting everything, except the indispensable work of his paper, for those daily journeys; but in all those fourteen days he saw neither the invalid nor her faithful nurse, Lucy Alford. He heard from the doctors that Miss Alford's fidelity was beyond all praise, and from Mrs. Colton he also heard of Lucy's devotion. For a week the patient continued in extreme danger, then there came a happy change,—nature rallied. At the end of the fortnight the Hampton doctor was triumphant, the London physician gravely satisfied. Mrs. Jerningham was able to come down to the drawing-room, to take a slow turn once a day on the sunlit strip of lawn before the windows, to eat a few mouthfuls of chicken or jelly, with some faint show of appetite. It was settled that she and her aunt should go to Madeira for the autumn and

winter, and for the immediate benefit of the sea-voyage, as soon as she could well be moved.

"In the meantime I have a little business to arrange," said Mrs. Jerningham.

"Let the business wait till next spring, my dear Emily," pleaded Mrs. Colton.

"I think not, auntie," the invalid answered, with a mournful smile.

On the following day she wrote her husband a brief note, which was addressed to Park Lane, and forwarded thence to Greenlands. The letter ran thus:

"DEAR MR. JERNINGHAM,—I have been very ill, and my doctors insist on my spending the autumn abroad. As there is always in such cases a risk of one's not returning, I should like much to see you before I go. Please come to Hampton at your earliest convenience, and oblige yours faithfully, E. J."

Having despatched this letter, Mrs. Jerningham abandoned herself to the delight of a long, quiet afternoon with Mr. Desmond, who was to see her that day for the first time since her illness.

He found her much changed; but the change had only increased her beauty. An almost supernal delicacy of tint and spirituality of expression characterized the thin face, the large, luminous eyes. The first sight of that loveliness, which was not of this earth, sent a sharp anguish to his heart. It cost him a struggle to return the invalid's greeting with a cheerful countenance, and to speak hopefully of her improved health.

"I shall never forgive myself that water-journey," he said.

"You have no cause to reproach yourself with that. It was I who obstinately faced the danger from first to last. But the doctors say the water-journey was only my culminating imprudence."

She changed the subject after this, and begged that no one would talk to her of her health. Laurence was surprised to find her so serene, so cheerful, so thoughtful of others, and forgetful of her own weakness. Never had she appeared to him more beautiful, never so estimable. Her manner to Lucy was peculiarly kind and tender.

"You can never know what this dear girl has been to me!" she said, holding Lucy's hand in both her own as she praised her. "In those long, miserable nights of delirium—I was delirious every night for more than a week, Laurence—I used to see her kind, pitying face watching me; and there was comfort in it when I was at the worst. Wilson was very good, and Aunt Fanny all that is kind and devoted; but this dear child seems to have been created to comfort the sick."

"I used to nurse poor papa when he was ill," the girl an-

swered, simply. "He was often delirious—much worse than you, Mrs. Jerningham; and he used to want to throw himself out of the window, or to kill himself with his razors. And then he would grow angry, and say that flies were tormenting him, and try to catch them,—when there were no flies, you know. It was very dreadful."

By and by Mrs. Jerningham asked to be left alone with her friend.

"I want to ask Mr. Desmond's advice about business affairs, auntie," she said. "He knows as much law as most lawyers, you know."

Mrs. Colton discreetly withdrew, accompanied by Lucy.

"It is nearly ended Laurence," said Mrs. Jerningham, when they were gone. She looked up at Mr. Desmond with a tender, earnest look, and held out her wasted hand. He took the pale, semi-transparent hand and raised it to his lips.

"What is nearly ended, my dear Emily?" he asked, gently.

"Your bondage."

"God forbid, if that means that I am to lose you."

"Yes, Laurence, that is inevitable. I doubt if the knot could ever have been disentangled; but it can be cut. Death makes an easy end of many difficulties; and I think nothing less than death could have ended our perplexities. I am not going to preach a sermon, dear friend. I only want you to understand that my doom is sealed, and that I know it is so, and am not altogether sorry."

"Oh, Emily, what a bitter reproof to me!"

"No, Laurence, a reproof to myself. My own short-sighted selfishness has been the cause of all our sufferings; for we have suffered acutely, both of us. I had no right to absorb your life; no right to hinder you from forming ties without which the most prosperous life seems blank and dreary; no right to stand between you and a home. But it is all over. I am drifting out of the troubled sea into a quiet harbour, and I can afford to be, not generous, but just."

"Emily!"

"Hear me patiently, dear. I will not talk of these things again. I know where your heart has been given, and what a pure unselfish love you have, almost unconsciously, won for yourself. I knew of that innocent love months ago; but I only knew your sentiments on the day of our Chertsey picnic. I was in the fernery when you told Lucy your secret. Yes, Laurence, I listened. It was a contemptible act, of course; but I was too desperate to consider that. I heard all you said—all. I heard enough to know your devotion, your generosity; to hate my own selfishness. All that day I felt myself the vilest of creatures. I knew that it was my duty to set you free; but I shrank, with

a miserable cowardly shrinking, from the sacrifice. I knew that for you and me together there could be no such thing as happiness, either in the present or the future; but I was capable of chaining you to my wretchedness rather than of seeing you happy with another. All that is most base and selfish in my nature was in the ascendant that day. No words can tell how I struggled with my wickedness. I was not strong enough to vanquish it. I knew that it was my duty to surrender every claim upon you; but I could not bring myself to face that duty. From the maze of my perplexities, extrication seemed impossible. Happily for all of us, Providence has given me a means of escape. I may keep you my prisoner to the end of my life, Laurence, and yet be guilty of no supreme selfishness, for my days are numbered."

"My dear Emily, why imagine this?"

"I know it, Laurence. I did not need to read it in the faces of my doctors, as I have read it. For a long time I have felt a sense of age creeping upon me; a weariness of life, which is not natural to a woman of thirty. Death has approached me very slowly, but his hold is so much the more sure. Comfort me as much as you like, Laurence, but do not delude me. I know that I have a very short time to spend upon this earth; let me spend some of it with you."

"I will be your slave, dear."

"And when I am gone you will forget how sorely I have tried you? You will remember me with tenderness? Yes, I know you will. And your young wife shall be no loser by my friendship, Laurence. I have the power to will away some of the money settled on me by Mr. Jerningham, and I shall divide it between my aunt and Lucy. My aunt has a very good income of her own, you know, and needs nothing from me, except as a proof of my affection for her. Your young wife shall not come to you dowerless, Laurence! Your wife! How sweet that word 'wife' can sound! I can fancy you in your home. You will not marry *very* soon after I am gone, Laurence?"

"My dearest," cried Laurence, with a sob, "do you think old ties are so easily broken? No, Emily, the love I have borne for you is a part of my manhood. It cannot be put away. That innocent girl, with her tender homelike sweetness, stole my heart before I was aware it could change; but she cannot blot out the past. If ever she is my wife, I shall love her dearly and faithfully, and a home shared with her will be very pleasant to me; but in the sacred corner of my heart must for ever remain the image of my first love. Men do not forget these things, Emily; nor is the second love the same as the first; and the man who outlives the faith of his youth feels that 'there hath passed away a glory from the earth.'"

"You will remember me, and there will be some regret in the remembrance. I ask no more of Fate. Oh, Laurence, we have had some happy hours together! Try to remember those. My life within the past year or two has been a long disease. Try to forget how I have worried you with my causeless jealousies, my selfish exactions."

Very tender and reassuring were the words which Laurence Desmond spoke to his first love after this. An almost extinguished affection revives in such an hour as this. As the candle of life burns brightest at the close, so too Love's torch has its expiring splendour, and flames anew before we turn it down for ever.

When Lucy and Mrs. Colton returned from their walk they found the invalid unusually cheerful. The voyage to Madeira was discussed, and Emily talked with delight of that distant island. Mr. Desmond was well up in the topography of the remote settlement, and planned everything in the pleasantest manner for the avoidance of fatigue to the invalid.

"I wish Potter were more used to travelling," said Mrs. Colton of the River Lawn butler. "We shall have to take him with us, I think; but he will be quite lost among Spaniards and Portuguese, and I don't know how he will be able to arrange affairs for us with regard to hotel accommodation, and so on."

"I will relieve Potter from all responsibility upon that question," said Mr. Desmond.

"You!" cried Emily.

"Yes, if you will permit me to be your escort. I spent a week in Madeira when I was on my Spanish wanderings."

"And you will leave London and your literary work in order to make our journey pleasant for us?"

"I would hazard more important interests than those I have at stake."

Mrs. Jerningham's eyes grew dim, and she had no words in which to thank the faithful slave from whom a few months before she would have haughtily demanded such allegiance, and bitterly resented its refusal.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FINAL INTERVIEW.

Mr. Jerningham was prompt to comply with his wife's request. On the second morning after the despatch of Emily's letter, the master of Greenlands appeared at River Lawn; and this, allowing for time lost in the re-posting of the letter, was as soon as it was possible for him to arrive there.

The change in his wife was painfully obvious to him, and shocked him deeply.

"I am sorry to see you looking so ill, Emily," he said, concealing his surprise by an effort.

"Do you think I should have sent for you if I had not been very ill? It was very good of you to come so promptly. I have to thank you for much generosity, for much thoughtful kindness, during the years of our separation. Believe me, I have fully appreciated your kind feeling, your delicacy. But since my illness, there has come upon me the feeling that something more was due to me than kindness or delicacy; something more due from me to you than quiet submission to your wishes. Do not think that I have entrapped you into this visit in order to reproach you, or to exalt myself. Justification for my conduct there is none. I can never hope to rehabilitate myself in your eyes or in my own, all I desire is that you should know the whole truth. Will you kindly listen to me and believe me? I have kept silence for years; I speak now under the impression that I have but a few weeks to live; you cannot think that I shall speak falsely."

"I am not capable of doubting your word, even under less solemn circumstances. But I trust you overrate your danger; convalescence is always a period of depression."

"We will not talk of that; my own instinct and the sentence of my doctors alike condemn me. They talk about the restorative effect of a sea-voyage, and send me to Madeira for the autumn and winter; and that, for a woman of my age, is a sentence of death."

"Let us hope it is only a precautionary measure."

"I have no eager desire for life; I can afford to submit to Providence. And now let me speak of a subject which is of more importance to me than any question as to the time I have to live. Let me speak to you of my honour—as a woman and as a wife. When you decreed that all ties between us except the one legal bond should be severed, your decree was absolute. There was no room left for discussion. You sent me your solicitor, who told me, with much delicate circumlocution, that your home was no longer to be my home. There was to be neither scandal, nor disgrace, nor punishment for me, who had sinned against my duty as a wife. I was only to be banished. I was too much in the wrong to dispute the justice of this sentence, Harold; too proud to sue for mercy. I let judgment go by default. You banished your wife from the fortress of home; you deposed her from an unassailable position to a doubtful standing; and you did this upon the strength of a packet of letters, which a bolder offender would have received at her own address, and which a more experienced sinner would have burned. I want you to grant me one favour, Harold,—read those letters before I die."

"I will read them when you please. Yes, I dare say I did

wrong in cancelling our union upon such trifling evidence of error; but I acted from my own instinct. I have been a Sybarite in matters of sentiment; and to live with a woman whose heart and faith were not all my own, would have been unutterably hateful to me. I jumped at no conclusions. I did not suffer my thoughts to condemn you unheard. But you had been living under my roof in secret correspondence with a man who called himself my friend. What could I do? Could I come to you and say, 'Please do not receive any more secret letters from Desmond; that is a kind of thing which I object to?' You would of course have promised to oblige me, and Desmond would have addressed his letters to another office. Having deceived me once, you see, I could hardly hope you would not deceive me again. That sort of thing grows upon one. On the other hand, why should I make a foolish scandal, read Desmond's letters,—which would have been an ungentlemanly thing to do, -subpœna your maid, your footman, make myself ridiculous, and humiliate you, for the profit of lawyers and the amusement of newspaper readers; and failing in convicting you of the last and worst of infamies, take you back to my home and heart a spotless wife? It seemed to me that there could be no course for us but a tranquil and polite separation."

"If you had read the letters you might have thought differently."

"My dear girl, with every wish to be indulgent, I can scarcely admit that. To my mind there are no degrees in these things. A woman is faithful or unfaithful. If the letter she receive contains but few lines about an opera-box, they should be lines which she can show her husband without a blush. There must be no lurking treason between the lines. She must not pose herself *en femme incomprise*, and call herself a faithful wife, because her infidelity does not come under the jurisdiction of the Divorce Court. You will say, perhaps, that this comes with a bad grace from me, whose life has been far from spotless. But, you see, spotlessness is not a man's speciality; and however vile he may be himself, he has a natural belief in the purity of woman. She seems to him a living temple of the virtues, and he scarcely expects to find a pillar-post lurking in the shadow of the sacred portico."

"I was very weak, very wicked," murmured Emily; "but I have some excuses for my error which other women cannot claim. If I had thought that you loved me,—if I had seen reason for believing that our marriage had brightened your life in the smallest degree, or that my affection, howsoever freely given, could ever have been precious to you, it might have been otherwise with me. Oh, believe me, Mr. Jerningham, you might

have made me a good wife, if you had cared to do so. Men have a power to mould us for which they rarely give themselves credit. It was not because of the twenty years' difference between our ages that I grew weary of my home, and sighed for more congenial society, for sympathy I had never found there. *That* was not the gulf between us. It was because you did not love me, and did not even care to pretend any love for me, that I welcomed the friendship of my father's old friend, and forgot the danger involved in such sympathy. Your marriage was an act of generosity, a chivalrous protection of a helpless kinswoman, and I ought to have been grateful. I was grateful; but a woman's heart has room for something more than gratitude. A man who marries as you married me is bound to complete his sacrifice. He must give his heart as well as his home and fortune. You gave me your cheque-book, but you let me see only too plainly that in the bargain which made us man and wife there was to be no exchange of hearts. What a union! How many times did we dine *tête-à-tête* in the two years of our wedded life?—once—twice—well, perhaps half a dozen times; and I can recall your weary yawns, our little conventional speeches, on those rare occasions. For two years we lived under the same roof, and we never even quarrelled. You treated me with unalterable generosity, unchanging courtesy, and you held me at arm's length; yet if you had wished to make yourself master of my heart, the conquest would have been an easy one. I was wounded by Mr. Desmond's silence; I was melted by your kindness. It would not have been difficult for me to give you a wife's devotion."

"I dare say you are right, Emily," Mr. Jerningham answered, with a little, languid sigh. His wife's earnestness had taken him by surprise, and a new light had broken in upon his mind as she spoke.

It was possible that there was some truth in these earnest, passionate words. He admitted as much to himself. Something more might have been required of him than a gentlemanly toleration of the woman he had chosen to share his home, to bear his name. The higher, Christian idea of a man's accountableness for the soul of his weaker partner was quite out of the region of Mr. Jerningham's ethics; but, on purely social grounds, he felt that he had done his cousin and his wife some wrong.

"I had exhausted my capacity for loving before I married," he thought; "and I gave this poor creature a handful of ashes instead of a human heart."

After a few minutes' silence he addressed his wife with an unaccustomed tenderness of tone.

"Yes, my dear Emily, you have just ground for complaint against me. My error was greater than yours; and now we

meet after a lapse of years—both of us older, possibly wiser—I can only say, forgive me."

He held out the hand of friendship, which his wife accepted in all humility of spirit.

"No, no," she exclaimed, "there can be no question of forgiveness on my part. You have been only too good to me, and my complaints are groundless and peevish. I suppose it is natural to a woman to try to excuse herself by accusing some one else. But, believe me, I have been no stranger to remorse. I could not die until I had thanked you for your indulgent kindness during the years of our separation, and asked you to forgive me. But before I ask for pardon, I beg you to read those letters."

She took a little packet from her work-basket and handed it to her husband.

"I will do anything to oblige you," said Mr. Jerningham, kindly; "but I assure you it is very unpleasant to me to read another man's letters."

He took the packet to a distant window, and there began his task. The letters were long—such clever, gossiping, semi-sentimental letters as a man writes to a lady with whom he is *aux petits soins*, without ulterior motive of any kind, for the mere pleasure involved in opening his mind and heart to a charming, sympathetic creature, whom he holds it better for himself "to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." Such letters are little more than the vehicles by which a man lets off the poetic gases of his brain, the herbals wherein he preserves the rarer flowers of his mind. Into such letters a man can pour all his caprices of fancy, all his audacities of thought; and as he writes, his mind is divided between tenderness for the dear recipient of his outpourings and a lurking consciousness that his letters will adorn his biography, and hold their place in polite literature, when the hand that runs along the paper to-day has mouldered in a coffin. In such letters every writer appears at his best. In the present he is writing for only one indulgent critic; in the future he fancies himself revealed to posterity with an audacious freedom forbidden by the natural reserve of a man who knows he will have to read a hundred and twenty reviews of his book.

Mr. Jerningham read Laurence Desmond's letters very patiently. He smiled faintly now and then in polite recognition of some little playful flight of the writer's fancy; but he was far from being amused. More than one smothered but dismal yawn betrayed his weariness, and it was with a sigh of supreme relief that he at last returned them to his wife.

"They are really clever," he said, "and hardly objectionable. They are the kind of thing that a Chateaubriand might have written to a Madame Récamier, and she was the very archetype

of female virtue. I can only regret the one fact that they were not addressed to your own house."

"My foolish cowardice was the sole cause of that error. I thought you would object to my receiving Mr. Desmond's letters, and they were a great pleasure to me."

"My poor child, if you had only examined my library in Park Lane, you would have found a hundred volumes of letters, from Pliny downwards, all of them better than Mr. Desmond's effusions. But I suppose there is a charm in being the sole recipient of a man's confidences. Every man writes that kind of thing once in his life; I have done it myself."

"And can you forgive me freely?"

"Forgive you! Why, my dear child, you have been freely forgiven from the hour in which we parted. I thought it best and wisest to end a union which had been too lightly made. It is possible I was wrong. Unhappily, I had exhausted my fund of hope before I met you, and had acquired an unpleasant knack of expecting the worst in every situation of life. I did not take those letters as conclusive evidence of guilt; on the contrary, I was quite able to believe their existence was compatible with innocence. But I told myself that such letters must be the beginning of the end, and I took prompt steps to avert an impending catastrophe. I did not want to be a spectacle to men and angels as the husband of a runaway wife. 'There shall be no running away,' I said. 'We will shake hands, and take our separate roads, without noise or scandal.' I suppose it was a selfish policy; and again I am reduced to say, forgive me."

After this Mr. Jerningham spoke no more of the past. He talked of his wife's health, her future movements. He tried to inspire her with hope of amendment, in spite of her physician's ominous looks, her own instincts; nothing could be kinder or more delicate than the manner in which he expressed himself both to Emily and to Mrs. Colton, who came in from the garden presently, and whom he thanked, with emphasis, for her devotion to his wife.

A quarter of an hour afterwards he was seated alone in railway carriage, speeding Londonwards by express train, and meditating profoundly upon the interview at River Lawn.

"Dying," he said to himself; "of that there can be no doubt. Of all the hazards of fate, this was the last I should have expected. And I shall be free; free to marry again, if I could conceive so wild a folly; free to marry Helen de Bergerac; free to inflict the maximum of misery upon an innocent girl in order to secure for myself the minimum of happiness. And yet, O God, what happiness there might be in such a union, if I could be loved again as I once was loved!"

He clasped his hands, and the day-dreamer's ecstasy brightened his face for a moment. The setting sun shone red upon the river over which the train was speeding, and Harold Jerningham remembered such a rosy summer sunset five-and-twenty years ago, and a sweet girl-face looking up at him, transfigured by a girl's pure love.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TIMELY BANISHMENT.

Before Eustace Thorburn could nerve himself for the self-sacrificial act which was to accomplish his banishment from that Berkshire Eden known as Greenlands, Fate took the doing of the deed out of his hands, and brought about his departure in the simplest and most natural manner.

For the completion of M. de Bergerac's ponderous work, it was necessary that certain rare manuscripts in the Imperial Library of Paris should be examined, and for the examination of these Mr. Thorburn's daily increasing knowledge of Sanscrit rendered him fairly competent. For the exile, Paris was a forbidden city, but to this young man, recommended by Mr. Jerningham, the Imperial Library would be open. M. de Bergerac had long meditated asking this favour of his secretary, and had watched the young student's progress in the Oriental dialects with impatient longing. The time had now arrived when he felt that Eustace was qualified to undertake the required work, and he took an early opportunity of sounding him upon the subject.

"There is work for some months," he said; "but Paris is at all times a pleasant city, and I do not think you would be tired of a residence there. I can give you introductions to agreeable people, who will receive my friend with all kindness. You can find some airy apartment near the library, and take your life easily. Your limited means will secure you from the temptations and dissipations of the capital, but not deprive you of its simpler pleasures."

"My dear sir, you are all goodness. I shall be only too happy to work for you in Paris, and on the most moderate terms. I have no wish for pleasure. Life is so short, and art so long; and I have such an impatient desire to succeed in the only career that is open to me."

"It is a noble impatience, and I will not stand in your way; give me four hours a day of such work as you have given me here, and the rest of your time will be your own."

After this interview there was nothing to hinder Mr. Thorburn's departure. He waited only for his employer's instruc-

tions, and his familiarity with all the details of the work made these instructions very easy to him; while frequent correspondence with his patron would enable him to work in perfect harmony with the author of the great book. Within a week of his perusal of his father's book, he bade his friends at Greenlands farewell, and started for London *en route* for Paris, provided with a letter from Mr. Jerningham to the chiefs of the British Embassy, which would insure his free use of the Imperial Library.

Helen's face told him that she was sorry to lose her friend and instructor. But the depth of that sorrow he could not fathom.

"Papa says it is likely you will be away three or four months," she said. "How much of my Greek I shall lose in that time! Papa never can find time for me to read to him now; and you will forget your pianoforte music, for I don't suppose you will take the trouble to practise in Paris. And I shall have no one to play the basses of my overtures."

Eustace murmured something to the effect that for him the cessation of those basses would be desolation and despair, but more than such vague protestations he dared not trust himself to utter.

"It is fortunate for me that I am sent away," he thought. "I could not keep silence much longer; and I know not when I could have found courage to tear myself from this sweet home."

Helen's thoughtful eyes looked up at him, wonderingly, as he stood before her, with her hand retained in his just a little longer than their relative positions warranted. But when they met his, the dark-blue eyes fell again, and the two stood silent, as if spell-bound.

The spell was broken by the voice of M. de Bergerac calling from the porch.

"The fly has been waiting ten minutes," he cried. "Come, Thorburn, if you want to catch the 4.30 from Windsor."

"Good-bye, Miss de Bergerac—God bless you! Thank you a thousand times for all your goodness to me!" said Eustace; and at the next instant he was gone.

"*My* goodness! And he has been so kind to me," murmured Helen.

She went to the open window and watched the fly drive away, and waved a parting salutation to the traveller with her pretty white hand. When the sound of the wheels had melted into silence, she went back to her books and her piano, and wondered to find how much there seemed wanting in her life now that Mr. Thorburn was gone.

"What will papa do without him?" she asked. The Newfoundland came into the room panting and distressed as she spoke. He had followed the vehicle that bore Eustace away, and had been repulsed by the driver.

"And what shall *we* do without him, Heph?" asked the lady, hopelessly, as she embraced her favourite.

Eustace found his uncle Dan waiting dinner for him in the comfortable room in Great Ormond Street; and in that genial companionship he spent the eve of his departure very pleasantly. The two men talked long and earnestly of the book which both had read. Eustace told his uncle of his idea about a Scotch marriage: and they went over the significant passages in the autobiographical romance together, with much deliberation.

"Yes, lad; I believe you 've hit it," said Daniel Maytield at last. "These vague hints certainly bear out your notion. I know not how far this domicile of something less than a year may constitute a Scotch marriage, for the laws of Scotland upon the marriage-question have been ever inscrutable; but it is evident the man believed himself in my sister's power."

"I should like to find the scene of my mother's sorrow," said Eustace. "Will you take a holiday when my work is done in Paris, Uncle Dan, and go to the Highlands with me, to look for that spot?"

"My dear boy, how can we hope to identify the place?"

"By means of this book, and by inquiry when we get to the neighbourhood,"

"The book gives us nothing but initials."

"No; but if the initials are genuine, as it is most likely they are, we may easily identify the spot with the aid of a good map."

"I doubt it."

"I assure you the thing is possible," said Eustace, earnestly. "There are several initials indicative of different localities. Let us start with the supposition that these are genuine; and if we can fit them to localities within a given radius, we may fancy ourselves on the right track. We have the general features of the place—a wild, mountainous district, steep cliffs, sands, and lonely shanties. See, I have jotted down the places indicated by initials. Here they are:—

"'1st. H. H. The head-quarters of Dion.

"'2nd. D. P. A craggy headland, crowned by a little classic temple.

"'3rd. The most uninteresting ruins in A. A would seem, therefore, to be the initial of the country.'

"There are your indications, Uncle Dan: the map or a guide-book must do the rest. You would take as much trouble to decipher a puzzle in arithmetic, or to work a difficult problem in Euclid. My mother's fate is more to me—nearer to your heart, I know—than all Euclid."

"But if we find the scene and identify it, what then?"

"The scene may tell me the name of the man."

"What, Eustace! still the old foolish eagerness to know what is better left unknown?"

"To the very end of my life, Uncle Dan. And now let us look at your map of Scotland."

"I have no map worth looking at. No, Eustace, there shall be no attempts at discovery to-night. Leave me that scrap of paper, and while you are away I will try to identify these places. When you return, we will take our Highland holiday together, come what may. It will be fresh life to me to get away from London, and I will not say how pleasant it will be to me to take my pleasure with you."

"Dear, true friend."

They shook hands, in token that to this plan both were irrevocably bound.

The morning's mail-train carried Eustace to Dover, and on the next night he slept at a humble hotel near the Luxembourg. He had no difficulty in finding a commodious lodging within his modest means, and he began his work at the great library two days after his arrival. The people to whom he brought letters of introduction were people of the best kind, but Eustace availed himself sparely of their hospitable invitations. His days were spent in the library; his nights were given to the great poem, which grew and ripened under his patient hand.

"If it should be a success!" he said to himself; "if it should go home to the hearts of the people—as true poetry should go—at once—with an electric power! It has brought the tears to my eyes, it has quickened the beating of my heart, it has kept me awake of nights with a fever of hope and rapture; but for all that it may be only fustian. A man's dreams and thoughts may be bright enough, but the translation of them cold and dull; or the thoughts themselves may be worthless—rotten wood, not to be made sound by any showy veneer of language."

The poem which was to make or unmake Mr. Thorburn was no metaphysical treatise done into rhyme—no ambitious epic, ponderous as Milton, without Miltonic grandeur. It was a modern romance in verse—a love-story—passionate, tender, tragical, and the heart of the poet throbbed in every line.

His life in Paris was eventless. Very dear to him were the letters that came from Greenlands—letters in which Helen's name appeared very often,—letters in which he was told that his absence was regretted, his return wished for.

"It is like having a home," he said to himself; "and I dare not return to that dear home, or must return only to confess my secret and submit to a decree of banishment!"

One of the letters from Greenlands—a letter that came to him when he had been about six weeks in Paris—brought him start-

ling news; Harold Jerningham was a widower. The handsome young wife, whom Eustace had heard of from his employer, had died at Madeira.

"They met before the lady left England," wrote M. de Bergerac, "and parted excellent friends. Indeed, they had never quarrelled. The reason of their separation was never revealed to the world, but Harold has half-admitted to me that he was to blame."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS.

For Emily Jerningham life's fitful fever was ended. The change to a softer climate, the welcome warmth of southern breezes, had given her a brief respite, but her doom had been sealed long ago, and her existence had been only a question of so many weeks more or less.

The journey by sea and the first two weeks in the strange island were very sweet to Emily Jerningham. Laurence Desmond accompanied her on that final voyage, and friendship, sanctified by the shadows of the grave, attended her closing days.

This seemed the natural solution to the enigma of her perplexed existence. Death alone could make an easy end of all her difficulties, and she accepted the necessity as a blessed release.

"It has been made easy to me to resign you, Laurence," she said, "and to pray for your future happiness with another. That poor little girl! I know she loves you very dearly. She reverences you as a heroic creature. Upon my word, sir, you are very fortunate. With me, had Fate united us, you would have been compelled to endure all manner of jealousies and caprices; and from that simple Lucy you will receive the pious worship that is ordinarily given only to saints."

Mrs. Jerningham would not allow Laurence to remain with her until the last dread hour. When they had been a fortnight on the island, and had exhausted the little excursions and sights of the place, she persuaded Mr. Desmond to return to England.

"I know you cannot afford to remain so far away," she said. "What may happen to the *Areopagus* in your absence! I have always heard that sub-editors are a most incorrigible class of people. They insert those things which they should not insert, and so on. You may find yourself pledged to something appalling in the way of politics when you get back to London; or discover that one of your dearest friends has been flayed alive by your most savage operator. And, you see, I am so

much better. I shall return to England in the spring quite a new creature."

In this manner did Mrs. Jerningham cajole her friend to abandon her. It was the final sacrifice which she offered up—the sacrifice of her sole earthly happiness.

She stood at her window watching the steamer as it left the island, and her heart sank within her.

He was gone out of her life for ever. Thus faded all the glory of her world. She sat alone till long after dusk, thinking of her wasted, mistaken life; while Mrs. Colton fondly believed her charge was enjoying a refreshing slumber.

The English doctor, who attended Mrs. Jerningham daily, found his patient much worse when he made his call upon the morning after Mr. Desmond's departure.

"I am afraid you were guilty of some imprudence yesterday," he said; "for you are certainly not looking quite yourself to-day."

"Yesterday was one of the quietest days I have spent on the island," replied Mrs. Jerningham; "I did not stir out of doors."

"That was a pity; for you ought to enjoy our good weather while it lasts. The rains will set in soon, and you will be a prisoner. But after our rainy season we have a delicious winter; and the voyage from England has done such wonders for you, that I really expect great things between this and the spring."

"Do you mean that you really think I am to live?" asked Mrs. Jerningham, looking at him earnestly; "to drag my life on for weeks and months, and perhaps for years?"

"Upon my honour I have strong hopes, as I told your aunt yesterday; the improvement since your arrival has been so marked that I can hope anything. You do not know what Madeira can do for weak lungs."

"Then I wish I had never come here."

"My dear madam, you—" cried the doctor, alarmed.

"That sounds very horrible, does it not, Mr. Ransom? But, you see, there is a time when one's life comes to a legitimate end—one's mission is finished. There is no room for one any more upon the earth, as it seems. The priest has said, *Ite, missa est;* the end is come. I do not want to prolong my life beyond its natural close; and that has come."

Mr. Ransom looked at his patient as if doubtful whether she were altogether in her right mind. But he did not discuss the subject; he murmured some little soothing commonplace, and departed to warn Mrs. Colton that the patient was disposed to depression of spirits, and must, if possible, be roused and diverted.

"I do not consider it altogether a bad sign," he said, cheer-

ingly; "that low state of the nerves is a very common symptom of convalescence."

To rouse and divert her invalid niece Mrs. Colton strove with conscientious and untiring efforts; but failed utterly. From the hour of Laurence Desmond's departure Emily drooped. A depression came upon her too profound for human consolation. In devout studies, in pious meditations alone she found comfort. Her aunt read to her from the works of the great divines, and in the eloquent and noble pages of Hooker and Taylor, Barrow and South, as well as in the Gospel's simpler record, the weak soul found comfort. But with earthly comfort she had done. A stranger, alone in a strange land, she waited the coming of that awful stranger whom all must meet once—he who "keeps the key of all the creeds." Utter desolation of spirit took possession of her. She was thrown back upon the spiritual world, and was fain to seek a dwelling-place among those shadowy regions, like a shipwrecked mariner cast upon a desert island, and rejoiced to find any refuge from the perils of the great ocean.

Letters came to the lonely invalid, in token that she was not quite forgotten by the world she would fain forget; letters, and papers, and books from Mr. Desmond, who wrote with much affectionate solicitude; notes of condolence and inquiry from the few friends with whom she was on intimate terms. But these were only the last salutations which life sent to her who dwelt by the borders of death—the last farewells waved by friendly hands.

"He is good and self-devoted to the last," she thought, as she read Mr. Desmond's letters; "and I do not think I should have induced him to leave me if he had not believed it would look better for me to be here alone with my aunt."

In this supposition Mrs. Jerningham was correct. Mr. Desmond was too much a man of the world not to be mindful of how things would appear to the eyes of the world, and it had seemed to him better that he should not prolong his stay at Madeira with the invalid.

He had returned to London, therefore, and had gone back to his work, which seemed very weary at this period of his life.

It was not possible that this utter severance should come to pass between him and Emily Jerningham without pain to himself. A man does not change all at once. However deeply he is bound to the new love, some frail links of the chain that tied him to the old hang about him still, some corner of his heart still holds the first dear image; and to the love that has been, the sorrow of parting lends a kind of sanctification.

Before leaving England Mrs. Jerningham had taken pains to provide for Lucy's future. The girl would gladly have accom-

panied her patroness to Madeira, but this Emily would not permit.

"You have had trouble enough in nursing me," she said, kindly; "and we must now try and find you a home in some pleasant, cheerful family. You must not be exposed any longer to the depressing influence of an invalid's society."

The pleasant family was easily found. Are there not always a hundred cheerful families eager to enlarge their home-circle by the addition of an agreeable stranger? Mrs. Jerningham showed herself very particular in her choice of a home for her *protégée;* and she was not satisfied until she had discovered an irreproachable clergyman's family, some miles northward of Harrow, who were willing to receive Miss Alford, and beneath whose roof she would have opportunities of improving herself.

"But, dear Mrs. Jerningham, had I not better go to the lady in Ireland, or to some other lady who wants a governess?" remonstrated Lucy. "I ought to be getting my own living, you know. Why should I be a burden upon your kindness? If I were of any use to you, it would be different; but you will not let me be your nurse."

"My dear girl, you are no burden! It is a pleasure to me to provide in some measure for your future. I promised Mr. Desmond that I would be your friend. You must let me keep my promise, Lucy."

Of the interview which had taken place between Emily and Laurence, Lucy knew nothing. Neither did she know that there had been a listener during that never-to-be-forgotten half-hour in which Mr. Desmond had told her his secret.

What her own future might be she could not imagine; and this arrangement for placing her with a clergyman's family beyond Harrow seemed to her a generous folly upon the part of Mrs. Jerningham.

She submitted only to please that lady; it would have seemed ungracious to refuse such kindness; but Lucy fancied she would have been happier if she had been permitted to renew her old struggles with fortune.

"Remember you are to improve yourself, Lucy," said Mrs. Jerningham; "I want you to become the most accomplished and ladylike of women."

And thus they kissed and parted. Emily breathed more freely when the girl had left her. That daily and hourly companionship with her happy rival had not been without its bitterness.

"The poor little thing has been very good to me," she thought; "but I cannot forget that she will be Laurence Desmond's wife when I am lying in my grave. And the winter winds will blow among the churchyard-trees, and the pitiless rain will fall upon

my grave, and those two will sit beside their fire, and watch their children at play, and he will forget that I ever lived."

Lucy went to her new home a few days before Mrs. Jerningham and her following sailed for Madeira. Between Lucy and Laurence there was no farewell. Mrs. Jerningham told Mr. Desmond what she had done for his old friend's daughter, and he approved and thanked her; but he expressed no wish to see the young lady, or to be introduced to the family with whom she had taken up her abode.

He made no attempt to see Lucy on his return from Madeira. In this he was governed by a supreme delicacy of feeling.

"While Emily lives I belong to her," he said to himself. "I am bound by a tie which only death can loosen."

The hour in which that tie was to be loosened came very soon. A heart-broken letter from Mrs. Colton told Laurence that he was a free man.

"She spoke of you a few minutes before her death," wrote Emily Jerningham's aunt. "'Tell him that one of my last prayers was for his future happiness,' she said. She suffered much in the last week; but the last day was very peaceful. I can never tell you all her thoughtfulness for others—for you, for me, for Lucy Alford, for her servants, the few poor people at Hampton of whom she knew anything. Her long illness worked a great change in her—a holy and blessed change. Generous, affectionate, and noble-minded she had always been; but the piety of her closing hours was more than I should have dared to hope, remembering her somewhat careless way of thinking when she was in health. In death she is lovelier than in life; there is a divine smile upon her face now which I never saw before. I have received instructions from Mr. Jerningham. My beloved niece is to be buried in the family vault in Berkshire. Oh, Mr. Desmond! what a mournful homeward voyage lies before me. I know not how I am to endure the rest of my life without my more than daughter!"

Laurence Desmond's tears fell fast upon the letter. The old familiar vision of the little garden at Passy, the proud, young face, the slim, white-robed figure, came back to him; and he recalled one summer afternoon, when his lips had almost shaped themselves into the portentous question, and he had restrained himself with an effort, remembering what his mentors of the smoking-room had said about the impossibility of marriage amongst a civilized community without a due provision for the indispensabilities of civilized existence.

"This comes of planning one's life by the ethics of the club-house!" he said to himself, bitterly.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HIDDEN HOPES.

Upon Mr. Jerningham the tidings of his wife's death came suddenly, but not unexpectedly. He hastened to arrange that all honour should be paid to the ashes of this fair scion of the house of Jerningham. The ponderous doors of the vault which had not been opened since his father's death unclosed to receive his wife's coffin. The bells which had rung a merry peal of welcome when she first came to Greenlands tolled long and dismally upon the day of her burial. All deference and ceremony that could have attended the burial of a beloved wife attended the funeral rites of her who had been only tolerated by her husband. Harold Jerningham was chief mourner at that stately, yet quiet ceremonial. His own hand had addressed the invitation that summoned Laurence Desmond to the funeral.

"The world shall read how we stood, side by side, at the door of the vault," thought Mr. Jerningham; "and the lips of Slander shall be mute about the poor soul's friendship for her father's friend."

Mr. Desmond understood and appreciated the delicacy of mind which had inspired the invitation. Even in that last dread ceremonial it was well that there should be some votive offering to Society. That deity has her shrine in every temple, and must be propitiated alike at wedding-feast or funeral. She is the modern successor of those nameless goddesses whom the men of old called amiable, and worshipped in mortal fear.

Theodore de Bergerac was present at the opening and closing of the vault, and invited Laurence Desmond to dinner when they left the church; but his invitation was declined.

"I will run down to dine with you in a week or two, if you will allow me," he said; "but to-day it is impossible. I have business that will take me back to town."

And so they parted; Laurence to go back to his chambers and spend the evening in dreary meditation, looking over the letters that had been written to him by that hand which now lay cold in the Berkshire vault. He had a photograph of the never-to-be-forgotten face, a few water-colour sketches of the river-scenery about Hampton; and these were all his memorials of the dead.

He packed them carefully in white paper, sealed the packet with many seals, and laid it in the most secret drawer of his desk.

"Thus ends the love of my youth," he said to himself; "God grant the love of my manhood may come to a happier ending!"

The first two months of his widowhood Mr. Jerningham spent abroad. For some subtle reason of his own he preferred to be away from Greenlands, and from his friends at the cottage, during that period of conventional mourning. Perhaps he would have been less inclined to absent himself from that beloved retreat if Eustace Thorburn had still been a dweller in M. de Bergerac's household.

That gentleman's residence in Paris threatened to extend itself to several months. The work found for him amongst old manuscripts and rare Oriental books increased every day, and the notes of the great history seemed likely to become as voluminous as Gibbon's *Rome*. Like Gibbon, M. de Bergerac had bestowed the greater part of his lifetime upon the collection of materials for his great book; but the materials, when collected, were more difficult to deal with than those upon which the matchless historian founded his massive monument of human genius; or it may be that M. de Bergerac was something less than Gibbon. In earnestness, at least, he was that great man's equal.

"Do not leave Paris until you have completely sifted the Oriental department of the library," he wrote to his secretary; "and if it is necessary for you to have the aid of a translator, do not hesitate to engage one."

To this Mr. Thorburn replied, modestly, that his own knowledge of the Oriental languages was increasing day by day; that he had been fortunate enough to fall in with a learned, though somewhat shabby, pundit among the frequenters of the Imperial Library; and that he had induced this person to work with him for an hour or two every evening on very reasonable terms.

"I cannot tell you what pleasure it has been to me to conquer the difficulties of these languages," he wrote to his kind employer. And, indeed, to this friendless young man every grammatical triumph had been sweet, every tedious struggle with the obscurities of Devanagari or Sanscrit a labour of love. Riches or rank he had none to lay at the feet of the fairl girl he loved; but by such dryasdust studies as these he could testify his devotion to that service which of all others was most dear to her affectionate heart.

Weeks and months slippped by in these congenial labours. The notes for the great book, and Eustace Thorburn's poem, grew side by side, and the young man had no leisure hour in which to nurse despondent thoughts. He was happier than he could have imagined it possible for him to be away from Greenlands. His work was delightful to him, because he was working for her. Yes; for her! His patient industry at the library was a tribute to her. His poem was written for her;

since, if it won him reputation, he might dare to offer her the name so embellished.

To Helen those autumn months seemed very dull. Her father's secretary had made himself so completely a part of the household as to leave a blank not easily filled. Both father and daughter missed his bright face, his earnest, enthusiastic talk, his affectionate but unobtrusive devotion to their smallest interests.

"We shall never have such a friend again, papa," Helen said, naïvely; and the little speech, with the tone in which it was spoken, inclined M. de Bergerac to think that Harold Jerningham's fears had not been groundless.

"You miss him very much, Helen?"

"More than I thought it possible I could miss any one but you!"

"And yet he only came to us as a stranger, my dear, to perform a stipulated service. In France a young lady would scarcely care to express so much interest in her father's secretary."

The girl's innocent face grew crimson. What! had she said more than was becoming? Had she deserved a reproof from that dear father whom she lived only to please? After this she spoke no more of Eustace Thorburn; but her father's mild reproof had awakened strange misgivings in her mind.

Mr. Jerningham returned to Greenlands before Christmas, and spent that pleasant season at the cottage. A peace of mind which he had not known since boyhood possessed him in that calm abode, now that he was a free man, and Eustace Thorburn no longer exhibited before him the insolent happiness of youth.

"This is indeed home!" he exclaimed as he sat by M. de Bergerac's hearth, and heard the carol-singers in the garden. "It is more than thirty years since Christmas was kept at the great house yonder. I wonder whether it will ever be kept there again within my life?"

"Why not?" asked his old friend; "you are young enough to marry again."

"Do you think so, Theodore?" inquired Mr. Jerningham, earnestly.

"Do I think so? Who should think so more than I? Was there ever a happier marriage than mine? And I do not ask you to make so bold a venture as I made in marrying a dear girl twenty years my junior. There are handsome and distinguished widows enough in your English society; women who, in the prime of middle age, retain the fresh beauty of their youth, with all the added graces given by experience of life."

"Thanks," said Mr. Jerningham, coldly; "I should not care to entrust the remnant of my life to a middle-aged person, how-

ever well preserved. I can exist without a wife. If ever I marry again, I shall marry for love."

He stole a glance at Helen. She was sitting by the fire, with an open book upon her lap, her eyes fixed dreamily. Where her wandering thoughts might be Harold Jerningham knew not; but he perceived they were not given to him. "Has the hour gone by?" he asked himself. "Has my hour gone for ever?"

"Nobly spoken, my friend," said Theodore; you will marry for love. And why not? God gave me a fair young bride, and seven years of happiness more complete than a man dare hope for on earth."

No more was said upon a subject so delicate. But from this conversation Mr. Jerningham derived considerable comfort; for he perceived that his old friend found no incongruity in the idea of his seeking something more than a marriage of convenience in a second union.

After this he came to the cottage with something akin to hope in his breast. Helen received him always with the same sweetness. He was her father's friend, and had been her father's protector in the hour of evil fortune. This fact was ever present to her mind; it imparted to her manner a sweetness which was fatal to Harold Jerningham.

Theodore de Bergerac watched the two together; and one day, as if by inspiration, the secret of his old friend's frequent visits flashed upon him. The danger that had existed for the young secretary existed also for the weary worldling, and girlish sweetness and simplicity had won a heart sated with life's factitious joys.

Within a week after the student achieved this brilliant discovery, Harold Jerningham made a full confession of his weakness.

"I know that at present I am no more to her than her father's old friend," he said, when he had told his story, and had discovered that M. de Bergerac was neither surprised nor shocked by the revelation; "but give me only sufficient time, and I may win that pure heart, which already half belongs to me by right of my affection for you. Earnest feeling in a man who is not quick to feel must count for something. Do not judge me by my past, Theodore. Dissever me from that past, if you can; for, as I live, I am a new man since I have loved your daughter. To love a creature so pure is a spiritual baptism. If I can win that innocent heart, you will not stand between me and happiness, will you, old friend?"

"If you can win her heart, no; but I will not sacrifice my daughter, or persuade her. I will confess to you that the uncertainty of her future is a constant perplexity to me, and that I would gladly see that future secured. I will say even more than this; I will admit that I should be proud to see my only child

allied to a race so distinguished as yours, the mistress of a home so splendid as your Greenlands yonder. But by no word of mine will I influence her to a step so solemn. The difference between your ages is greater than in the case of myself and my dear wife; but the world might possibly have augured ill for the result of our union. Again, I say, if you can win my child's heart I will not refuse you her hand."

This was all Mr. Jerningham desired. A reluctant bride, sacrificed on the altar of ambition, would have been no bride for him. He was too much a gentleman not to have recoiled from the brutality involved in such an union. All he desired was the liberty to woo and to win; to set his many gifts against that one obvious disadvantage of his fifty years, and to triumph in spite of that stumbling-block.

"Time and I against any two," said Philip II. of Spain. Mr. Jerningham's chief reliance was on time; time, which might first render his society habitual, and then necessary, to Helen; time, which would familiarize her with the difference between their ages, until that difference would scarcely seem to exist; time, which by demonstrating his constancy and devotion, must in the end give him a claim upon Helen's gratitude, a right to her compassion.

Time might, perhaps, have done all this for Mr. Jerningham but for one small circumstance: the stake for which he was playing this patient game had already been won. It remained no more upon the table for gamblers to venture its winning. The girl's innocent heart had been given unconsciously to a silent adorer; and while Harold Jerningham was hanging upon her looks and studying her careless words, all her tenderest thoughts and dreams were wafted across the Channel to the industrious exile clearing his way through the great jungle of Arianism, in the Imperial Library of Paris.

Winter passed, and the early spring brought news to Mr. Jerningham. A noble Scottish kinsman had died, leaving him a handsome estate in Perthshire. It was necessary that he should visit this new acquisition, and make all arrangements for its due maintenance; but he was sorely averse from leaving Greenlands, and the simple household in which he had learned to be happy.

"I suppose I must go," he said; "Lord Pendarvoch was a confirmed miser, and I know he kept the place in a most miserable condition. When I was last in the neighbourhood, many years ago, there was not a fence fit for a civilized country, or a boundary-wall that kept out his neighbour's cattle. Yes, I suppose I must go and take possession, and shake hands with my tacksmen, and establish my claim to be regarded as a scion of the true blood—though it comes to me zigzag fashion, through

a female branch of the old house. My mother's mother was an aunt of the last lord."

Mr. Jerningham lapsed into reverie. It was early April; green buds already bursting in the old-fashioned garden, and a wealth of pear and plum-blossom, snowy white; but the rich red of the apple-trees not yet opened. Tulip and hyacinth, polyanthus and primrose, were bright in the borders; rich red wallflowers bloomed on the old wall; all the garden was gay with the fresh spring blossoms.

"Do you remember what you said about Switzerland, Helen?" Mr. Jerningham asked, abruptly after rather a long silence.

"I remember saying a great deal about Switzerland."

"And of your desire to see that country?"

"Yes, indeed! but that is too bright a dream. Papa confesses that his book is the kind of book that never *is* finished. William Mure of Caldwell did not live to finish his book, you know, though the subject is a narrow one compared to the theme of my dear father's labours; and Müller's book was left unfinished. How can I ever hope to go to Switzerland, since I should care nothing for the most beautiful land unless papa was my fellow-traveller?"

"We will persuade your father to publish the first two volumes of his book some day, and then we can all start for Switzerland together. But in the meantime allow me to inquire if you have ever thought about Scotland?"

"I have read Sir Walter Scott's delightful stories."

"Of course," cried Mr. Jerningham, with unwonted vivacity; "and those charming romances have inspired you with an ardent desire to behold the scenes which they embellish—the land of mountain and of fell, the land of Macgregor and Ravenswood, of heart-broken Lucy Ashton and weird Meg Merrilies. Do not think of Switzerland till you have seen the Scottish highlands."

"But the snow!" urged Helen.

"Snow! In Scotland I will show you mountain-peaks upon which the snows have never melted since the days of the Bruce; and from those snow-clad hills you shall look down into no dazzling abyss of awful whiteness, but out upon the waste of waters, with all their changeful play of light and shade, and varying splendour of colour, and animated motion. In Switzerland remember, you have no sea."

"But the ice-oceans—the glaciers?"

"Better in the descriptions of Berlepsch than in reality; and even he admits that they are dirty. Upon my honour, the highlands of Scotland are unsurpassable."

"And then?" inquired Helen, laughing. "Why this sudden enthusiasm for Scotland, Mr. Jerningham? Oh! I forgot; you

are now a proprietor of the northern soil, and I suppose this is only a natural burst of proprietorial pride."

This accusation Mr. Jerningham disdained to answer.

"Helen! he said, with mock solemnity, "has it never occurred to you that your father must require change of scene—some relief from the monotonous verdancy of sylvan Berkshire—some respite from those eternal spreading beeches which provoke from commonplace lips ever-recurring allusion to the hackneyed Tityrus? That you yourself have languished for bolder scenery—snow-clad mountain top, and wide blue lake—I am well aware; but do you think our dear scholar does not also require that mental and physical refreshment which comes from the contemplation of unknown lands and the breathing of unfamiliar breezes; or, in two words, do you not think that a brief spring holiday in the highlands would be of great advantage to my dear friend?"

The student came out of the porch in time to hear the conclusion of Mr. Jerningham's speech. The master of Greenlands and Helen de Bergerac had been strolling up and down the lawn in front of the cottage during this conversation.

"What are you talking about, Harold?" asked the Frenchman.

Helen was prompt to answer his question.

"Oh, papa, Mr. Jerningham has been saying that you must require change of air and scene, and that a trip to Scotland would do you wonderful good. And so I am sure it would."

"Yes, Theodore, I want you to go with me to Pendarvoch. The place itself is scarcely worth showing you, but the surrounding scenery is superb; and Helen informs me she languishes to behold the Scottish highlands."

"Oh, Mr. Jerningham!" cried Helen; "when did I ever say——"

"Not a minute ago. And you know the advantage to your father will be unspeakable."

"But my book?" urged the student.

"You will return to it with renewed vigour after your holiday. You told me only the other day that you had of late experienced a langour, a distaste for your work, which denoted physical weakness; and——"

"Oh, papa!" cried Helen, alarmed! "you do not confess these things to me! It is quite true; you have been looking tired lately. Nanon remarked it. Pray let us go to Scotland."

"Can you refuse her?" asked Mr. Jerningham.

"When did I ever refuse anything to this dear child?"

"And when did she ever ask anything that you should refuse? Come, Theodore, it is the first favour I have asked of you for a long time. I must go to Pendarvoch; and I cannot

bear to leave this place, where I have been so happy, unless I can take those with me who have made the spot so dear."

To a woman of the world, the tone of these words, and the look which accompanied them, would have spoken volumes. To Helen they told nothing, except that Mr. Jerningham was sincerely attached to her father and herself. She had always thought of him as her father's devoted friend, and it seemed to her only natural that she should be included in that friendship. She liked Harold Jerningham better than she liked any one, except those two people who reigned side by side in her heart; and the line which divides the outer tokens of liking and loving is so narrow a demarcation, that Harold Jerningham might easily be betrayed into fond hopes that were without foundation. Her manner to this friend of her father's was all sweetness. His tender accents, his fond, admiring looks, she accepted as the natural gallantries of a man so much her senior. Her very innocence made her more dangerous than the most accomplished of coquettes. And at this notion of a trip to the Highlands she brightened and sparkled, and placed herself at once on Mr. Jerningham's side. For so many reasons the plan was delightful to her. First and chiefest of such reasons, it promised to benefit her father; secondly, she had long known and rejoiced in the romances of the northern enchanter, and the very sound of Scottish names conjured a hundred visions of romance before her mind's eye; thirdly, there had come upon Greenlands, upon her garden, her poultry-yard, her books, her piano, the river, the woods—nay, over the very sky that arched the woods and river, a shadow of dulness from the hour of Eustace Thorburn's departure. The old places had lost their familiar charm—the old pursuits had become wearisome. She fancied that amidst new scenes she would be less likely to miss her old companion; and then, in the next breath, said to herself, "How *he* would have liked to see Scotland!"

A great deal of argument was required to convince Theodore de Bergerac that it could be for his benefit to uproot himself from the spot he so dearly loved in order to travel to remotest regions of the north. He had the Frenchman's natural horror of foreign countries; and having once niched himself at his nest at Greenlands, cared not to stir thence, how fair soever might be the distant lands he was invited to visit. The argument which at last prevailed was that urged by Helen's pleading face. *That* entreaty the tender father was powerless to resist.

"My darling, it must be as you wish," he said, and the rest was easy. Mr. Jerningham did not suffer the grass to grow under his feet. He was prompt to make all arrangements, and three days after the subject had been mooted, the travellers were on their northward way, speeding to Edinburgh by express.

They were to spend three days in Edinburgh, then onward by easy stages, "doing" all the lions in their way, to the village and castle of Pendarvoch, which lay half in Perthshire, half in Aberdeenshire.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NORTHWARD.

The travellers had not left Greenlands two days when Eustace Thorburn arrived there. He had finished his work in Paris a month sooner than he had expected to do so, and had been glad to hurry home, in order to complete his arrangements with an eminent publishing firm, who, after considerable hesitation, had agreed to publish his poem without hazard of capital on his part, though not without foreboding of loss on theirs.

M. de Bergerac had not forgotten to write to his secretary, announcing the Scottish expedition; but he had only written an hour before starting, and the letter and the secretary had crossed each other between Dover and Calais. Eustace came to Greenlands full of hopeful agitation. He had not forgotten the promise made his uncle. He had not forgotten that he was pledged to make a full confession to his kind patron, and to accept his banishment, if need were. His Parisian exile had only deferred the evil hour; it must now come, and speedily; and the decree would be spoken, and he and Helen must in all likelihood part for ever. But in the meantime he would see her once more, and it was for this unspeakable blessing he languished. For the last night of his sojourn in Paris sleep had been impossible. He could think only of the delight to which he was hastening—to see her once again! His love had grown day by day, hour by hour, during these long months of absence. As the train ploughed onwards through dusty flats, as the steamer danced across the sunlit waters, this one traveller counted the miles, and calculated the moments until he should near the beloved spot where his idol dwelt.

He knew that his Uncle Dan would have been glad to see him, even for a brief exchange of greetings and shaking of hands; but he could not bring himself to spend the half-hour that it must have cost him to call in Great Ormond Street. Swift as a hack-cab could take him, he rushed from station to station, was so lucky as to catch a fast train for Windsor, and entered the shady avenues of Greenlands within fourteen hours of his departure from Paris.

How fresh an verdant the spring landscape seemed to him!—the cowslips and bluebells, the hawthorn buds just beginning to whiten the old rugged trees, gummy chestnut husks scattering the ground, and from afar the rich odour of newly-opened lilacs.

"And to think that for its master this place has no charm!" he said to himself wonderingly.

His heart beat fast as he opened the gate of the bailiff's garden. Here all things looked their brightest and prettiest. The birds were singing gaily in the porch. The deep voice of Hephæstus boomed from the hall, and the dog ran out to repel the intruder, but changed his bass growl of menace into a noisy demonstration of delight at sight of the traveller.

Even this welcome Eustace was glad to receive. It seemed a good omen. The door stood wide open; he went into the hall, with the dog leaping and bounding about him as he went. No one appeared. There was no sound of voices in any of the rooms. He opened the drawing-room door softly, and went in, prepared to see Helen bending over her books at a table in the window. But Helen was not there, and the room looked cold and dreary. Never had he seen the books so primly arranged, the piano so carefully closed. No cheery blaze brightened the hearth, no flowers perfumed the atmosphere. His instinct told him that a change had fallen upon the pleasant home. He rang the bell, and a fresh country housemaid answered his summons.

"Lor' a mercy, sir, how you did startle me!" she said. "I a'most thought it was ghostes, which they do begin sometimes with ringin' o' the bells."

"Is yous mistress away from home?" asked Eustace.

"Yes, sir, and master, too. They both be gone to Scotland for a month or more. Didn't you get the letter as master sent you, sir? I heard him say as he'd wrote to tell you they was gone.'

They had gone to Scotland! To find them absent from Greenlands was in itself a wonder to him; but it seemed to him a kind of miracle that they should have gone to Scotland, that country which he was bent upon exploring in his search for the scene of his mother's sorrows.

"What part of Scotland has your master gone to, Martha?" he asked the housemaid.

The girl shook her head despondently, and replied that she had not "heard tell." They were to travel with Mr. Jerningham, she believed. That gentleman had come into property in Scotland, and they were going to see it. This was the utmost she had "heard tell on."

With Mr. Jerningham! What should make that gentleman Helen's travelling companion? A sudden pang of jealousy rent Eustace Thorburn's heart as he thought of such a companionship. What could have brought about this Scottish journey? Having possessed himself of Martha's slender stock of information on this point, Eustace went to the kitchen to

question Nanon; but with little more success. The Frenchwoman was voluble, but she could tell him scarcely anything.

They were to visit many places, she said, but she knew not where. The names of those barbarous countries had slipped from her memory. It was far, very far; and they were to be absent a month. Oh, but it was dismal without that sweet young lady! Nanon had nursed her as a baby, and never before had they been so long asunder.

"For a month! It is frightful to think of it," shrieked Nanon. She invited Mr. Thorburn to rest and refresh himself—to dine, to sleep, to make the place his home as long as he pleased. M. de Begerac had left instructions to that effect. But the disappointment had been too bitter. Eustace could not endure to remain an hour in the house which had been so dear to him, now that the goddess who had glorified it dwelt there no longer. He declared that he had particular business to do in London, and must return thither immediately. He was eager to arrange for the Scottish expedition which had been planned by himself and his uncle—eager to start for the country to which Helen was gone, as if he would thereby be nearer her.

Before bidding old Nanon good-day, he made a final effort to extort from her some information.

"Surely M. de Bergerac must have left you some written address," he said, "in the event of your having occasion to write to him?"

"No, sir; if I wanted to write, I was to give my letter to Mr. Jerningham's steward; that was all. They will be going from place to place, you see, sir. It is not one place they go to see, but many."

With this answer Eustace was compelled to be satisfied. He could not push his curiosity so far as to go to Mr. Jerningham's steward, and ask him for his master's whereabouts. And again, what benefit could it have been to him to know where Helen had gone? He had no right to follow her.

He hastened back to London, and to Great Ormond Street, where he was doomed to wait three dreary hours, turning over his Uncle Dan's books, before that individual made his appearance, somewhat flushed from dining, and jovial of manner; but in nowise the worse for his dinner and wine.

"I have been dining in St. James's Street, with Joyce of the *Hermes*, and Farquahar of the *Zeus*," he said. "A thousand welcomes, dearest boy! And so you came straight from the station to find your faithful old Daniel? Such a token of affection touches this tough old heart."

"Not straight from the station, Uncle Dan," the young man answered, with a guilty air. "I have been down to Berkshire. M. de Bergerac and his daughter have started for Scotland with Mr. Jerningham."

"What takes them to Scotland in such company?"

"Mr. Jerningham has just succeeded to an estate in the north; that is all I could discover from the servants at the cottage. This Scottish expedition must be quite a new idea, for there was no allusion to it in M. de Bergerac's last letter to me."

"Strange!"

"And now, Uncle Dan, I want you to keep your promise, and start for your Highland holiday with me."

"What! we are to rush post-haste for the Highlands, in search of your Helen?"

"No; on a more solemn search than that."

"Alas, poor lad! On that one subject you are madder than Prince Hamlet. Every one has his craze. But I pledged myself to be your companion, and I must keep my promise. You are really bent upon going over the ground on which that sad drama was enacted?"

"Fixed as fate, Uncle Dan."

"So be it. Your faithful kinsman has been at work in your absence, and has made things smooth for you."

"Is it possible, dear friend?"

"There's nothing a man of the world can't do when he's put to it. A reperusal of Dion's autobiography enabled me to identify the divine Carlitz of that narrative with a lady who took the town by storm when I was a young man, and who afterwards married a nobleman of eccentric repute. Once possessed of this clue, it was easy for me to identify her *fidus Achates*, the amiable H., as Mr. Elderton Hollis, a gentleman connected with dramatic affairs for the last quarter of a century, and still floating, gay and *débonnaire*, upon the border land of the theatrical world,—a gentleman with whom I myself have some acquaintance. To make a long story short, I contrived to throw myself in Hollis's way at the Quin Club; and after a glance at the theatrical horizon of to-day, drifted into the usual commonplaces about the decay of dramatic talent. 'Where are our Faweetts, our Nisbetts, our Keeleys, our Carlitzes?' I sighed; and at the last familiar name, the old fellow pricked up his ears, like a hound at the huntsman's. 'Hark forward!'"

"'Ah, my dear Mayfield, that *was* a woman!' he exclaimed. 'You are, of course, aware that I was her secretary, her adviser, her treasurer,—I may say, her guardian angel,—before her brilliant marriage; and now, sir, she cuts me, though I give you my word of honour that marriage could never have taken place but for my management of her affairs."

"This bears out the autobiography," cried Eustace, eagerly.

"To the letter. I first sympathized with Mr. Hollis, and then pumped him. I found him somewhat reserved upon the subject of that northern expedition; but after some beating about the

bush, I got from him the admission that the lady whom we will still call Carlitz was in Scotland just before her marriage with Lord V.; and by and by he let slip that the spot was in the extreme north of Aberdeen. This much, and no more, could I obtain. Examination of a tourist's map showed me a headland called Halko's Head, in the north of Aberdeenshire. This is likely to be the H. H. of Dion's book, and thither we must direct our steps."

"My dear uncle, you have done wonders!"

"And when you find the place, what then?"

"I shall discover the name of the man."

"Who knows? The chase of the wild-goose is a sport congenial to youth; but April is a cold month in Scotland, and I wish the expedition could have been contrived later."

Eustace would fain have started next morning, had it been possible; but two days were necessary for Mr. Mayfield's literary affairs, and the agreement with the editors as to what contributions he was to send to the *Areopagus* and another journal during his absence, and so on.

"I must scribble *en route*, you see, Eustace," he said; "the mill will not stop because I want a holiday."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HALKO'S HEAD.

A SEVENTEEN hours' journey conveyed Mr. Mayfield and his nephew to the granite city of Aberdeen, with only a quarter of an hour's pause at Carlisle, where the travellers were turned out upon the platform at the chillest hour 'twixt night and morning, and tantalized by the sight of blazing fires in a luxurious waiting-room.

The travellers arrived at Aberdeen at noon, and devoted the remainder of that day and the next to the exploration of the city, dismantled cathedral, and sparse relics of the old town; the narrow street where, over a grocer's shop, still exist the rooms once inhabited by the boy Byron and his mother. They made an excursion to the old bridge of Don—an easy walk from the city—and loitered there for some time, leaning on "Balgounie's brig's black wall," and talking of the poet whose one line has made it famous.

To Eustace every hour's delay was painful. He longed to push on to that remote point of the shire where Halko's stormy headland showed grim and gray against the broad blue sea. They had made all inquiries about this culminating point of their journey, and had been informed that Halko's Head was a very wild place, where there were but just a few fishermen's cottages, but where folks sometimes went in the summer for

fishing and such-like. Railroad to Halko's Head there was none; but the rail would convey them about two-thirds of the way, and thence they could doubtless obtain some mode of conveyance.

"We can walk, if need be," said Eustace, cheerily; and to this Mr. Mayfield assented.

"Though 'tis somewhat long since I have distinguished myself as a pedestrian," he added, doubtfully.

"You can take your ease at your inn, Uncle Dan, and spin copy for your ravening editors, while I push on to that place."

"Perhaps it would be best so, Eustace," answered Mr. Mayfield, thoughtfully.

He divined that the young man was anxious that his first visit to that scene should be made companionless. The memories connected with that spot were too sad for sympathy—too bitter for friendly commune.

After an evening which the indefatigable essayist devoted to a review of a new translation of Juvenal for the *Areopagus*, and Eustace to meditations of the most sombre hue, they left Aberdeen at daybreak next morning, and went on to a small station, which was their nearest point to Halko's Head.

This nearest point proved five-and-twenty miles distant from the fishing village; but on inquiry the travellers discovered that there was a comfortable halting-place at a village or small town eighteen miles farther on, and only seven from the wild headland to which Eustace Thorburn's steps were bent.

Vehicles were not easily to be obtained at this remote station, and the travellers decided upon walking the eighteen miles at a leisurely pace, stopping to examine anything worth seeing which they might find on their route.

The day was bright and clear, and their road lay across the short turf of broad uplands overhanging the wide northern sea.

They reached the little town at set of sun, and found the chief inn a somewhat rude but not comfortless hostelry. Here they dined upon liberal Scottish fare, and sat long after their meal smoking by the wide hearth, where sea-coal and odorous pine-logs made a glorious fire.

Even his Uncle Dan's talk could not distract the younger man's thoughts from that one subject upon which he had of late pondered so deeply. Within seven miles lay the spot where his mother had lived and suffered, something less than a quarter of a century ago. All day he had been thinking of her. The wild scene on which he looked was the landscape over which her sad eyes had wandered wearily, looking for some faint star of hope where hope was none. The waves of this northern sea had sounded the monotonous chorus of her melancholy thoughts.

"O mother!" he said to himself, "and of all your young

day-dreams, your girlish sorrows, there were none which you dared speak of to the son you loved so dearly! Even this bitter penalty you had to pay—the penalty of a lifelong silence. For your grief there was no sympathy, for your memories no confidant."

He left the mountain-shanty quietly at day-break next morning. Host and hostess were stirring, but Daniel was sleeping profoundly in his humble nest—a mere cupboard in the wall of the room where the travellers had dined. Eustace had occupied a similar cupboard, and was not sorry to exchange so stifling a couch for the fresh breath of the north wind blowing over the red mountains.

The path from Killalochie to Halko's Head traversed a wild and picturesque country, high above the sea. Eustace looked down from the mountain-road, across the edge of precipitous cliffs, upon a broad sweep of sand—the sands on which his nameless father had walked full of fear on the night of his mother's disappearance. Before noon he entered the little village, if village it could be called, a straggling group of rude stone cottages, inhabited by fishermen, whose nets hung on the low granite walls, and lay on the stunted turf before the doors. Two or three cottages of a better class were to be seen on the outskirts of the little colony, but even these presented small attraction to the eyes of the English traveller.

This was Halko's Head. Eustace questioned a rough fisher-boy before he could convince himself that he did indeed tread the scene of his mother's sad experiences—of his father's selfish perfidy

For artist or poet the place had ample charm, but for the ordinary pleasure-seeker it would have appeared as barren as it was remote. Wilder or less fertile landscape was not to be found in North Britain; and to this untravelled wanderer the rough fishermen and brawny fisherwives seemed as strange as the inhabitants of Central Africa.

How was he to find the house in which his mother had lived, the people who had known her, after the lapse of four-and-twenty years? This was a question which he had not asked himself until this moment, when he stood a stranger amongst that scanty population, upon the headland he had come to explore.

He walked about the little place, descended a steep flight of steps cut in the cliff, which he identified as the Devil's Staircase of Dion's narrative; walked about half a mile along the sands, and then saw, glimmering in the sunlight, high above him, the little white temple, where his mother had so often sat alone and pensive, looking out at the barren sea.

From the sands where he was walking, this classic summer-

house was inaccessible; but Eustace had no doubt of its identity with the temple described by Dion. How such an elegant affectation as this classic edifice should exist among those barren moorlands, peopled only by grouse and ptarmigan, was in itself an enigma, and one which Eustace was anxious to solve.

As the temple was unapproachable from the sands, the traveller was fain to retrace his steps to the Devil's Staircase, and thence to the village. Here he found a humble place of entertainment, where he asked for such refreshment as the house could afford him, in order that he might use the privileges of a customer in the way of asking questions. A healthy-looking matron, past middle life, neatly clad in linsey petticoat, and cotton bedgown, with snow-white muslin head gear, and brawny bare feet, brought him his meal, and with her he began at once to converse, though the worthy dame's dialect sorely puzzled him, and but for his familiarity with the immortal romancer, would most probably have baffled him altogether.

Happily, his intimate acquaintance with the Gregoragh, and the Dougal Creature, his long-standing friendship for Caleb Balderstone and Douce Davie Deans, with many others of the same immortal family, enabled him to comprehend the greater part of the guidwife's discourse, though he had occasional difficulty in making himself intelligible to her.

The gist of the conversation may be summed-up thus. Did gentlefolks from the south ever come to Halko's Head? Yes, some, but not many. There were but three houses suitable to such folks—Widow Macfarlane's, the cottage beyond the Devil's Staircase; Mistress Ramsay's on the Killalochie Road; and a shooting-box of Lord Pendarvoch's. But this latter place had been suffered to fall into decay many years ago. It had been shut up for the last quarter of a century, except now and then, when my lord had lent it to one of his friends that came for the shootings. All the shootings round about, farther than you could see, belonged to Lord Pendarvoch. But he was just dead, poor old body! and little loss to any mortal creature, for he had been nothing better than a miser since his young days, when he was wild and wasteful enough, if folks spoke true. That "wee bit stone hoosie" on the cliff had been put there by my lord, who brought the stone "posties" from foreign parts.

Here was the mystery of the classic temple fully explained. Eustace knew very little of the peers of the realm, and Lord Pendarvoch was to him only as other lords—an unfamiliar name.

"You have lived here many years, I suppose?" he said to the hostess.

She told him, with a pleasant grin, that she had never lived

anywhere else. That pure mountain air she had breathed all her life. On Halko's Head her eyes had first opened.

On this Eustace proceeded to question her closely as to her recollections of any strangers who had made their abode at the fishing-village about four-and-twenty years before. He described the young couple—a gentleman and lady—"bride and bridegroom," he said, with a faint blush.

After much questioning from Eustace, and profound consideration upon the worthy dame's part, a glimmer of light broke in upon her memory.

"Was it at Lord Pendarvoch's they lived?" she asked.

"That I cannot tell you. But since you say there are only three houses suitable to strangers of superior condition, I suppose it was at one of those three the lady and gentleman had lived. They were here some months. The lady was very young, very pretty. She left suddenly, and the gentleman followed her a few days afterwards.

"Ay, ay, puir thing! I mind her the noo!" exclaimed the woman, nodding the head sympathetically.

After this she told Eustace how such a couple as he described—the lady "as bonny a lass as ye'd see for mony a lang mile"—had lived for some months at Lord Pendarvoch's shooting-box; and how the lady had been very sad and gentle, and much neglected towards the last by the gentleman, until she ran away one day, in a fit of jealousy, as it was thought, because the gentleman had been seen riding and driving with a strange foreign woman from London; and the gentleman had thought she'd drowned herself, and had been well-nigh mad for a night and a day, till news came that quieted him, and then he went away.

This much—full confirmation of Dion's story—the woman could tell Eustace; but no more. The name of these southern strangers she had never heard, or, having heard, had utterly forgotten. Of their condition, whence they came, and how they obtained license to occupy Lord Pendarvoch's house, she was equally ignorant Nor could she direct Eustace to any inhabitant of the village likely to know more than herself. There had not been for years any care taken of the shooting-box. Lord Pendarvoch was just dead. His old steward had died six years before, and a new man from the south—"folks were all for southrons noo"—had succeeded to his post.

Pendarvoch Castle was a day's journey off, on the other side of the county.

To obtain further information seemed hopeless; but Eustace was determined to leave no stone unturned. Why should he not go to Pendarvoch Castle before he left Scotland, see the old servants?—for old servants there must be in a large household,

whatever changes time and death might have brought about in four-and-twenty years. Some one there might be who would remember to whom Lord Pendarvoch had lent his house in that particular year. It was at least a chance, and Eustace resolved upon trying it.

He questioned his hostess as to the way back to Killalochie. She told him that there were two ways, one by the sands at low tide, the shorter of the two, since there was an inlet of the sea between Halko's Head and Killalochie, which was dry at low tide. It was a place that strangers went to see, the dame told Eustace, because of a cavern dug in the face of the cliff, that a saint lived in once upon a time—"joost a wee bit cavey," the good woman called it.

Eustace thanked his hostess for her civility, paid her liberally for his humble refreshment, and bade her good-day, after inquiring his way to the disused abode of Lord Pendarvoch.

This dwelling he found easily enough. It was built in a hollow of the cliff, about a quarter of a mile from the village, midway between the fishermen's cottages and the classic temple. The house was small, but built in the Gothic style, and with some attempt at the picturesque. "Decay's effacing fingers," however, had done their worst. The stucco had peeled off wherever there was stucco to peel; the stone was stained with damp, and disfigured with patches of moss; the woodwork rotted for want of an occasional coat of paint. A scanty grove of firs sheltered the house on its seaward side, and tossed their dark branches drearily in the spring breeze, as Eustace opened the rusty iron gate and entered the small domain. No element of desolation was wanting to the dreary picture. A bony goat cropped the stunted grass pensively, but fled at sound of the intruder's footfall.

No barrier defended the deserted dwelling. Eustace walked round the house, and peered in at the casements, whereof the shutters gaped open, as if their fastenings had rusted and dropped off with the progress of time. Within the traveller saw scanty furniture of a remote era, white with dust. He pulled the rusty handle of a bell, and a discordant jangle sounded in the distant offices; but he had no hope of finding any inmate. The abode bore upon its front an unmistakeable stamp of abandonment.

After pulling the jangling bell a second time, Eustace tried one of the windows. Half a dozen broken panes gaped wide, as if in invitation to the burglar's hand. He unhasped the sash, pushed open the spurious Gothic window, and went in. The room in which he found himself had once been gaily decorated; but little except the tawdry traces of vanished colour and tarnished gilding remained in evidence of its former splendour. The furniture was battered and worn, and of the scantiest description. Lank, empty book-cases of painted and gilded

wood stood in the recesses of the fire-place. He tried to picture his father and mother seated together in that dreary room; his mother watching by that dilapidated casement. The room might have been bright enough five-and-twenty years ago.

On the same floor there was another room, with less evidence of departed decoration; above there were four bed-chambers, and here the furniture was piled pell-mell, as in a lumber-room. The view from the windows was sublimity itself, and Eustace did not wonder that a Scottish nobleman should have chosen to build himself a nest on so picturesque a spot.

He walked slowly through the rooms, wondering where *her* aching head had lain, where *her* sad heart had stifled its griefs, where *her* penitent knees had bent to the Heaven her sin had offended. To tread these floors which she had trodden, to look from these windows whence she had gazed, seemed to him worth the journey the barren privilege had cost him.

He lingered in the dusty rooms for some time, thinking of that one sad inhabitant whose presence had made the house sacred to him as the holy dwelling of Loretto to faithful pilgrims, and then softly and slowly departed, pausing only to gather a few sprigs of sweet-briar that grew in a sheltered corner of the neglected garden. With these in his breast he went back to the road leading to Killalochie, and bent his steps towards that humble settlement. He looked at his watch as he regained the road. It was three o'clock, and by six he could be with his uncle, who would scarcely care to dine until that hour.

"I can take him to that house to-morrow," he said to himself, "if he would like to see it. And I dare say it would be a mournful pleasure to him to see the rooms, as it has been to me. It is like looking at a grave."

CHAPTER XL.

HOPELESS.

Between Killalochie and Halko's Head the road was of the loneliest. On his morning journey Eustace Thurburn had encountered about three people, sturdy mountaineers, who gave him friendly greeting as they passed him. For the first few miles of his return he met no one; and when he seated himself to rest on a rough block of stone near the junction of two roads, the wide expanse of land and sea which the spot commanded was as solitary as if he had been the first man, and the world newly-created for his habitation.

It is not to be supposed that even on this day every thought of Helen de Bergerac had been banished from the wanderer's mind. He had too long and too habitually indulged himself with tender memories of the pleasant hours they had spent

together. Thoughts of her were interwoven with all other thoughts and all other memories.

Upon that lonely road he had found ample leisure for meditation; and now, as he sat alone amidst the solitary grandeur of that mountain district, it was of Helen and of the future he thought. Nor were his meditations hopeful. Alone, nameless, his task well-nigh finished for the one kindly patron whom fortune had sent him, with nothing but a manuscript poem and a publisher's half-promise between him and poverty, was he a fitting suitor for Theodore de Bergerac's only daughter? By what right could he demand her father's confidence? What promise could he make? what hopes advance? None. To sum up his best claim, his brightest aspiration, would be only to say, "Sometimes, when the demon of self-doubt ceases for the moment to torment me, I believe I am a poet. Of my chances of winning the world to believe as much, I know nothing. Assured income in the present or expectation in the future, I have none."

He considered his position with a gloomy hopelessness that was almost despair. What could he do but despair? He knew that his patron liked him; nay, indeed, had honoured him with a warm regard; but would that regard stand him in good stead should he presume to offer himself as a husband for his patron's only daughter? Mr. Jerningham's influence would, he knew, be exercised against him, since, for some mysterious reason, that gentleman had chosen to regard him with a malignant eye. And he knew that Mr. Jerningham's counsel would not be disregarded by his old friend.

"No; there is no ray of hope on the dark horizon of my life," thought the young man. "Better for me that I should never see Helen again."

The sound of carriage-wheels startled him from his reverie. He looked up, and saw a landau and pair approaching him by the cross-road. The apparition of such an equipage in that rugged district surprised him. He stood up and looked at the advancing carriage, and in the same moment recognized its occupants.

They were M. de Bergerac, his daughter, and Mr. Jerningham The Frenchman was quick to recognize his secretary.

"*Holà!* Stop, then!" he cried to the coachman; and then to Eustace, "Come hither, young wanderer. To see the ghost of the Chevalier—your hapless Charles Edward—standing by that stone, would not more have surprised me. Jump in, then. There is no objection to his taking the fourth place, I suppose, Harold?"

Mr. Jerningham bowed, with an air which implied that, upon a subject so utterly indifferent to him as the secretary's movements, he could have no opinion but that of his friend.

"Why, how bewildered you look, Eustace!" exclaimed M. de Bergerac, as the young man took his place in the carriage with the manner of a sleep-walker. "And yet you must have expected to see us. You followed me down here with your papers. What foolish devotion! Tell your man to drive on, Harold."

Eustace had recovered himself a little by this time, and had shaken hands with Helen, whose too expressive face betrayed an emotion no less profound than his own. Nor were those eloquent glances lost upon Mr. Jerningham, who watched the young people closely, from beneath thoughtful brows.

"And so you thought your French documents worth a pilgrimage to Scotland?" said M. de Bergerac.

"No, indeed, sir. This meeting is only a happy accident for me. I knew you were in Scotland. They told me as much in Greenlands; but they could tell me no more."

"But in that case, what brings you here?" cried the Frenchman.

"I am here with my uncle—on business."

"On business!" exclaimed M. de Bergerac, looking at his secretary, in amazement.

Harold Jerningham also regarded the young man, with a new sharpness of scrutiny.

"On business!" repeated M. de Bergerac. "But what business could possibly bring you into these remote wilds?—to the utmost limits of your civilization."

"Perhaps it can scarcely be called business," replied Eustace. "It would be nearer the mark to call it a voyage of discovery. I came from Paris when my work was done, and found Greenlands deserted. My time was my own, awaiting your return. My uncle and I had a fancy for a holiday, and we came here."

"It is, at least, a remarkable coincidence."

"Very remarkable," said Mr. Jerningham, with a suspicious look.

He was not inclined to regard the meeting as a coincidence. The young adventurer had, no doubt, been informed as to their whereabouts, and had followed them. And yet of their *precise* whereabouts he could not have been informed, for beyond the border of Aberdeenshire, neither Mr. Jerningham's steward nor any one else had been apprised of their movements.

"Unless there were secret communications between Helen and him," thought Harold Jerningham. And this seemed utterly impossible. To suspect Helen—to suspect the girl whom he had learned to adore as the very type of all feminine excellence, the incarnate ideal of womanly innocence! Great heaven to discover deceit *there!*

"It would be a fitting end to my career," he thought, bitterly.

"Your uncle is travelling with you, then?" said M. de Bergerac.

"Yes; he is now at the inn yonder, at Killalochie, where I must rejoin him; so I must ask you not to take me too far off the right road."

"But is it imperative that you rejoin him to-day? Do you think I am not eager to question you about the work you have done for me in Paris? Can you not dine with us? Mr. Jerningham will, I know, be charmed to have you." That gentleman bowed an icy assent. "Can't you spare us this evening?"

To refuse this invitation Eustace Thorburn must have been something more than mortal. Happily for his honour he had told his uncle that it was just possible he might find his explorations at Halko's Head too much for one day's work, and might sleep at that village. He was thus free.

"We dine and sleep at a village ten miles from here," said M. de Bergerac. "The people at the inn can give you a bed, no doubt; and you can get back to Killalochie to-morrow."

Eustace accepted the invitation, and was then favoured with some account of his employer's wanderings.

"We have rested nowhere, but have seen everything worth seeing between the Tweed and these mountains," said M. de Bergerac. "I begin to think that Jerningham is the original Wandering Jew. He knows everything, every trace of Pictish camp, and every relic of the early convents, from St. Columba to St. Margaret. There is a cave on this coast which we are to see before we leave the neighbourhood; a cave cut in the face of the cliff, with outer and inner chamber, in which one of the Scottish saints spent the evening of his pious days, among the sea-gulls."

"Yes; I heard of that cave at Halko's Head," said Eustace.

"You have been to Halko's Head?" asked Mr. Jerningham.

"I was returning from that place when your carriage picked me up."

"Why do we not go to Halko's Head, if it is worth seeing?" asked M. de Bergerac.

"It is not worth seeing. A mere handful of fishermen's cottages, on a craggy headland;" replied Mr. Jerningham.

"And yet Mr. Thorburn goes there?"

"I cannot help Mr. Thorburn's bad taste; but we can drive to Halko's Head to-morrow, if you please. I told you, when we came into this part of the country, that there was little calculated to interest any one but a sportsman."

"But I was determined to see Aberdeenshire," replied M. de Bergerac, with playful insistence. "Why not Aberdeenshire? Why should we explore all other shires of Scotland, and neglect Aberdeenshire? I had read of the Cairn-gorm mountains, and wanted to behold them."

"You know Halko's Head, Mr. Jerningham?" said Eustace thoughtfully.

"I know every inch of Scotland."

"Did you know Halko's Head four-and-twenty years ago?"

For some reason the question startled Harold Jerningham more than he was wont to be moved for any insignificant cause.

"No," he answered, shortly. "But what motive had you for such a question?"

"I want to find some one who knew that place four-and-twenty years ago."

"Why?"

"Because a person very dear to me was living there at that time."

"An insufficient reason for such curiosity about the place, I should think," replied Mr. Jerningham, coldly. "But you are a poet, Mr. Thorburn, and are not bound by the laws of reason."

Helen interposed here, and began to question Eustace about his Parisian experiences. She had felt that Mr. Jerningham's tone was unfriendly, and was eager to turn the current of the conversation.

The two young people talked together during the rest of the drive, and Mr. Jerningham listened and looked on. He had fancied himself gaining ground rapidly during this northern tour; and now it seemed to him all at once as if he had gained no ground, as if he were no nearer to the one dear object of his desires. What delight these two seemed to find in their frivolous discourse! To listen and look on,—was that to be his lot for the rest of his weary days?

"O God, am I an old man?" he asked himself, with passionate self-abasement.

The consciousness that his days of hope and pride are over,—the wretched revelation that for him there are to be no more roses, no more spring-time, no more of the brightness and glory of life,—will come upon a man suddenly like this, in brief, bitter gusts, like the breath of an east wind blowing in the face of midsummer.

M. de Bergerac had watched his old friend and his daughter with pleasure during this Scottish tour. It seemed to him also as if Harold Jerningham was gaining ground, and it pleased him that it should be so. To him the master of Greenlands appeared no ineligible suitor, for of the darker side of his friend's life and character he knew nothing.

The ten miles' drive upon a very indifferent road, uphill and downhill, occupied more than two hours, and it was seven o'clock when the carriage entered the little town where the travellers were to dine. At the inn all was prepared for them. They dined in a room commanding a noble view of the sea, and

having a half-glass door which opened on a rude kind of terrace-walk.

Here M. de Bergerac and his secretary strolled after dinner, talking of Oriental manuscripts in the spring moonlight, while Harold Jerningham and Helen played chess, upon a little board which the travellers carried, in the room within.

"And when we return to Greenlands, which we are to do in a week, shall I find you at your post?" asked M. de Bergerac, kindly. "A great deal of work remains to be done before my first two volumes will be ready for publication. Jerningham strongly recommends my publishing the first two volumes as soon as they are ready. We shall have plenty to do in giving them the final polish. Much that I have now in the form of notes must be interwoven with the text. The frivolous reader recoils from small type. You are not tired of your work, I hope?"

On this Eustace spoke. He felt that the time had come, and that he dare not longer keep silence.

"Tired of my work! Oh, if you knew how delightful my service has been to me!" he exclaimed; and then in the next breath added, "but I fear I shall never again inhabit Greenlands."

And then he made full confession of his offence. He told how this mad folly had grown upon him in the happy days of the previous year.

"I was counting my chances as you drove up to me to-day," he said, "little thinking I was so soon to see your daughter's sweet face. I was fighting with despair as I sat by the mountain-road. Speak plainly, dear sir, you cannot say harder things to me than I have said to myself."

"Why should I say anything hard? It is no sin to love my daughter. I ought to have known that it was impossible to live near her, and refrain from loving her. But do not talk to me of despair. What is a young man's love but a fancy which is blown to the end of the earth by the first blast of Fame's mighty trumpet? My dear young friend, I am not afraid that you will break your heart, or, at least, that the heart-break will kill you. I broke my heart at your age. It is an affair of six weeks; and for a poet a broken heart is inspiration."

"Oh, sir, for God's sake, do not trifle with me!"

"My dear friend, I am telling you the truth. I thank you for your candour, and in return will be as candid. I admire and love you, almost as I could have loved a son. If you could give my daughter a secure position—a safe and certain home, however unpretending—I would be the last to oppose your suit. But you cannot do this. You are young, hopeful, ambitious. The world—as your poet says—is your oyster, which with your sword you'll open. But the oyster is sometimes impenetrable.

I have seen the brightest swords blunted. I am an old man and an exile; my sole possession in the form of *rentes viagères.* You would promise my child a home in the future. I cannot wait for the future. I am an old man, and I must see my darling provided with a safe shelter before I die, so that, when death crosses my threshold, I may be able to say, 'Welcome, inevitable guest. The play is finished. *Vale et plaudite.*'"

"God grant you may live to see your grandchildren's children."

"I will not gainsay your prayer. But when it is a question of grandchildren, a man is bound to be doubly circumspect. What is the meaning of an imprudent marriage, of which the world talks so lightly? It is not my daughter only whom I doom to care and poverty, but how many unborn innocents do I devote to misfortune? Forgive me if, upon this subject, I seem hard and worldly. I would do much to prove my regard for you; but my child's future is the one thing that I cannot afford to hazard."

"You are all goodness, sir," replied Eustace, with the gentle gravity of resignation. "I scarcely hoped for a more favourable sentence."

He said no more. He had, indeed, cherished little hope; but the agony of this utter despair was none the less acute. M. de Bergerac compassionated this natural sorrow, and was conscious that he was in some wise to blame for having brought the two young people together.

"If she, too, should suffer!" he thought. "I have seen her interest in this young man—her regret when he left us. Great heaven! how am I to choose wisely for the child I love so well?"

He looked to the window of the room where Harold Jerningham and Helen sat together in the dim light of two candles. The man's patrician face and the girl's fresh young beauty made a charming picture. M. de Bergerac had no sense of incongruity in the union of these two. The accomplishments and graces of middle age harmonized well with the innocent beauty of youth, and it seemed to him a fitting thing that these two should marry.

"Not for worlds would I sacrifice her to a father's ambition," he said to himself; "but to see her mistress of Greenlands, to know that her life would be sheltered from all the storms of fate, would comfort me in the hour of parting."

Eustace bade his patron good-night presently, making some lame excuse for not returning to the sitting-room. In vain did the kindly Frenchman essay to comfort him in this bitter hour.

"I thank you a thousand times for your goodness to me on this and every other occasion," the young man said, as they shook hands. "Believe me, I am grateful. I shall be proud and happy to go on working for you in London, if you will allow

me; but I cannot return to Greenlands—I cannot see your daughter again."

"No, it is better not. Ah, if you only knew how short-lived these sorrows are!"

"I cannot believe that mine will be short-lived. But I do not want to complain. Once more, good-night, and God bless you! I shall leave this place at daybreak to-morrow."

"And when shall you return to London?"

"That will rest with my uncle. I will write to you at Greenlands directly I do return. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, and God bless you!"

Thus they parted. Eustace did not go back to the house immediately, but wandered out into the little town, and thence to the open country, where he indulged his grief in solitude. It was late when he went back to the inn, and made his way stealthily to the humble garret-chamber which had been allotted to him.

Here he lay, sleepless, till the cock's hoarse crow blent shrilly with the thunderous roll of the waves. At the first faint streak of daylight he rose, dressed, and went softly down stairs, where he found a bare-footed servant-girl opening the doors of the house. By one of these open doors he departed unobserved, while the bare-footed damsel was sweeping in some mysterious locality which she called "Ben." The morning was dull and drizzling; but what recks despair of such small inconveniences? The young man set out on his lonely walk, breakfastless and hopeless, scarce knowing where his steps led him.

After walking about a mile, he took the trouble to inquire his whereabouts from the first person he encountered, who informed him that he was fifteen miles from Killalochie, and fourteen from Halko's Head.

On this he determined to walk to Halko's Head. He wanted to see that place once more, and to visit the little classic temple on the cliff, which on the previous day he had omitted to examine. He was in no humour for even his uncle's society, and dreaded a return to the little inn at Killalochie, where genial Dan would question him about his adventures, and where he must perhaps reveal his disappointment, if that could be called a disappointment which had annihilated so frail a hope.

"A day's solitude will do me good," he thought, as he turned his face toward's Halko's Head. "I can get back to Killalochie by nightfall, before my uncle can alarm himself about my absence."

The walk occupied some hours, and when the traveller entered the little fishing village nature asserted herself in spite of despair, and he was fain to order breakfast at the humble hostelry where he had lunched the day before.

The same woman waited upon him: she was the mistress of the house, and again he questioned her about the lady and gentleman who occupied Lord Pendarvoch's house four-and-twenty years ago; but she could tell him no more to-day than yesterday. No new facts had returned to her memory during the interval.

As Eustace Thorburn sat alone after this unprofitable conversation, the first anguish of despair yielded to the sweet whispers of hope. Was his case indeed utterly hopeless? M. de Bergerac asked security for the future. That he could not now offer; but if his poem should win recognition, the pathway of literary success would be opened to him, and on his industry and perseverance alone would depend his speedy achievement of a secure position in the world of letters. Such an income as his Uncle Daniel earned with ease, and squandered with even greater facility, would support a home which M. de Bergerac's simple taste would not despise.

"Why should I not win her as fair a home as she has at Greenlands," he said, "and if she loves me she will wait. Ah, if I had only seen her, if I had but told her how devotedly she is loved!"

And then he reproached himself for his precipitancy. In his desire to act honourably, he had played too much the part of a little boy who asks a boon of his schoolmaster. He had at least the right to plead his own cause with Helen de Bergerac.

He told himself that if his poem should be a success, he could go to Greenlands once more to entreat permission to speak to his divinity. Armed with the talisman of success, he could ask as much. And then he thought of Helen's youth. What might he not achieve in a few years? He remembered what his uncle had said to him—"If her love is worth winning, she will wait."

He took a manuscript volume from his pocket, and turned the leaves thoughtfully. It was the fair copy of his *magnum opus*, which he had brought with him on this journey for leisurely revision, but on which he had as yet worked little. From these manuscript pages he tried to obtain comfort. If the world would only listen! He measured his strength against the minor poets of his day. Surely there was something in these verses that should win him a place among the younger singers.

He left the inn by and by, and walked slowly along the cliff to the little classic temple. The April day had brightened, and the sun shone upon the waves, though there were ugly black clouds to the windward.

The temple on the cliff could tell him nothing. But it was the scene of his mother's loneliest hours, and he contemplated it with a tender interest. The mountain weeds—such wild flowers as flourish in the breath of the sea, had clustered thickly round the bases of the slim Ionian pillars: gray moss and lichen defaced the marble, white as it looked from the distance. Eustace

seated himself on the crumbling stone bench, and lingered for some time, looking out over the sea, and thinking now of his mother, now of Helen de Bergerac, anon of that unknown father whose sin had made him nameless.

From this long reverie he was disturbed by the soft thud of hoofs upon the short turf, and looking landwards, he saw a horseman trotting towards the temple. Within a few yards of the spot he dismounted, and came to the temple, leading his horse. Before this Eustace had recognized Mr. Jerningham, the man who had surprised him reading *The Disappointments of Dion*, the man who bore some resemblance to himself, and must therefore resemble his father—the man who, by a series of coincidences, seemed involved in that mystery of the past which he was so eager to penetrate.

If Mr. Jerningham's appearance here was surprising to Eustace, the presence of Eustace at this spot seemed no less astounding to Mr. Jerningham.

"They told me you had returned to Killalochie," he said.

"No; I wanted to see this place before I left this part of Scotland."

"I cannot imagine what interest you can possibly have in a spot so remote."

"The interest of association," Eustace answered. "But have I not as much reason to wonder what should bring you here, Mr. Jerningham?"

"That question is easily answered. A proprietor is generally anxious to examine his newly-acquired possessions. This summer-house comes to me with the rest of my kinsman Pendarvoch's property."

"Lord Pendarvoch was related to you!" exclaimed Eustace.

"He was."

"Strange!"

"What is there so strange in such a relationship?"

"Nothing strange except to me. It is only one more in a sequence of coincidences which concern me alone. I came to this part of Scotland to discover a secret of the past, Mr. Jerningham, and perhaps you can help me to penetrate that mystery. Four-and-twenty years ago, Lord Pendarvoch lent his shooting-box yonder to a gentleman whose name I want to know. Can you tell me if I shall find any old servant at Pendarvoch likely to be able to answer this question for me, or do you yourself know enough of your kinsman's friends at that period, as to be able to give me the information I seek?"

To these inquiries Mr. Jerningham had listened gravely, with his face somewhat averted from the speaker.

"No," he replied, coldly, "I knew very few of Pendarvoch's friends. I cannot help you to identify the person who may

have borrowed his house a quarter of a century ago. Every man makes a *tabula rasa* of his memory half a dozen times within such a period. Existence would be unbearable if our memories wore so well as you seem to suppose they do. As to my cousin's old servants, they are all dead or imbecile. If you want information, you may spare yourself the trouble of going to Pendarvoch, and question these marble columns. They will tell you as much as the Pendarvoch servants."

"Do not think me obstinate if I put that to the test. I have determined not to leave a stone unturned."

"I cannot understand your eagerness to pry into the secrets of the past. I begin to fancy you are hunting some lost estate —perhaps plotting to dispossess me."

"No, Mr. Jerningham, it is not an estate I am hunting; it is a lost name."

"You appear to delight in enigmas. I do not."

"I will not bore you with any further talk of my affairs. And this temple is yours, Mr. Jerningham. I may never see it again. Forgive me if I ask you not to pull it down. Let it stand. For me it is sacred as a tomb."

Harold Jerningham stared aghast at the speaker. A question rose to his lips, but his voice failed him, and it remained unspoken. He stood pale, breathless, watching the young man as he bent his knee upon one of the steps of the temple, and gathered a handful of the wild flowers that clustered about the stone.

"Your friends and I are to dine at Killalochie," he said, presently, while Eustace's head was still bent over the flowers; "we both return by the same road, I suppose?"

"I think not; the tide is low, and I have set my heart upon going back by the sands."

"Do you think it quite safe to venture?"

"I should imagine so. At Halko's Head they told me the way was safe at low tide.'

"But are you sure the tide is on the ebb?"

"It looks like it."

"I would warn you to be cautious. The tide upon this part of the coast is dangerous, at least I have heard people say as much."

"I am not afraid," answered Eustace, with some touch of bitterness. "A man whose life is hardly worth keeping may defy fortune."

"Life at five-and-twenty is always worth keeping. Take my advice, Mr. Thorburn, and ask advice from the fisher-folk before you set out on your walk."

"Thanks; you are very good; I will take your advice. And M. de Bergerac and his daughter are to dine at the Killalochie Inn, where I am pledged to rejoin my uncle to-day. I did not think I should see them again before I left Scotland."

After this Eustace Thorburn bade Mr. Jerningham good morning, and departed in the direction of that rough flight of steps known as "The Devil's Staircase." Harold Jerningham tied his horse's bridle to one of the marble columns, and paced to and fro upon the short grass, darkly meditative.

"What does it mean?" he asked himself, "this young man's appearance at this spot — his searching inquiries about the people who occupied Pendarvoch's house four-and-twenty years ago? The very time! A spot so remote, so rarely visited—a house so seldom inhabited! Can he be any relation of—*hers?* A nephew, perhaps. And yet, is that likely? Her father and mother died more than twenty years ago. Who should have set this man upon the track? And he gathered those wild flowers, and put them in his breast, with the air of a man whose associations with the spot were of the closest and most tender. And in Berkshire I came upon him reading *that* book —that wretched record of heartlessness and folly. Yes, it is the spot. When I last stood here I was young and beloved. I, who now hang upon the looks of a girl less lovely than she who gave me a kind of worship. Nothing that I possess, nothing that I can do, will win me such a love as that I spurned. O God! the bitterness of late remorse! I let her go, broken-hearted, and I know not how long she lived or how she died. I cannot think a creature so tender could long survive sorrow and ignominy, such as I made her suffer. Here we have sat side by side, and I have grown weary of her company. If she could arise before me now—pale, faded, in rags—I would fall upon my knees before her, and claim her as my redeeming angel. 'Welcome back, sweet spirit!' I would cry. 'In all these years I have sought for happiness, and found none so pure and perfect as that you offered me. In all these years I have sought the love of women, and have never been loved as you loved me!'"

Alas! that the dead cannot return! To her whose fate had been so dreary, what warm welcome, what atoning tears, might have been given if she could have come to claim them! A cold gust of wind swept along the cliff as Mr. Jerningham invoked the departed spirit. It seemed to him like a breath from the grave.

"She is dead," he said to himself; "I call her in vain."

He, too, stooped to gather a few of the yellow hill-flowers, and put them in his breast. Then, after one long, mournful look at the deserted summer-house, he mounted his horse, and rode slowly to the dilapidated shooting-box which had come to him with the rest of his kinsman's estate. At the gate of this humble domain he dismounted again, and left his horse cropping the rank grass in the neglected garden, while he made his way into

the house, very much after the manner in which Eustace Thorburn had penetrated it upon the previous day.

He walked quickly through the rooms, and left the house hurriedly. To him the gloom of the dust-whitened chambers was almost intolerable.

"Why do I grope among dry bones and dead men's skulls?" he asked himself. "Can any man afford to retrace his steps over the ground he trod in his youth? Shall I, above all men, dare the phantoms of the Past?"

He mounted his horse, and rode away without a glance behind him, as if he had, indeed, encountered some ghostly presence in that empty dwelling-place.

"I will have it rased to the ground next week," he said to himself. "Why should it stand for ever as a monument of my faults and follies? And that young man, De Bergerac's *protégé*, entreated me to spare the summer-house yonder, because it is sacred to him! To him? What should make it sacred in his eyes? What connection can he have with *that* dark story! And they say he is like me—indeed, I have myself perceived the resemblance. I will question him closely to-night at Killalochie."

At Halko's Head Mr. Jerningham stopped to refresh his horse, and ordered refreshment for himself, for the benefit of the humble hostelry where he stopped. Here he dawdled away an hour and a half very drearily, for the repose of his steed. The weather had changed for the worse when he emerged from the little inn. Ominous black clouds obscured the horizon, and a shrill east wind whistled across the barren hills. Looking seaward from the lofty headland, Mr. Jerningham saw that the tide had risen considerably since he had last looked at the sands.

"When did the tide turn, my man?" he asked, of the lad who brought him his horse.

"Above two hours ago, sir."

"Two hours ago! It was turning then when Thorburn went down to the sands," thought Mr. Jerningham. And then he again questioned the boy: "I suppose any one setting off by the sands for Killalochie at turn of tide would get there safely?" he asked.

The boy shook his head with a doubtful grin.

"I dinna ken, sir. Folks fra' Halko's Head mun start when the tide wants an hour o' turning, if they'd get to Killalochie dry-shod."

"Great heaven!" cried Harold Jerningham, "and that young man is a stranger to the coast."

He left his horse in the care of the lad, and went to consult a little group of idle fishermen congregated before one of the cottages. From these men he received the most dismal confirmation of his fears. The walk from Halko's Head to Killalochie could

not be done between the turning of the tide and its full. Between the two places there was no way of getting from the sands to the cliffs, or only points so perilous and difficult of ascent, as to be impossible to any but the hardiest samphire-gatherer, or boldest hunter of eaglets, bred on those rough coasts. What was just possible for a Highland fisherman, would be, of course, impossible to a literary Londoner.

"Do you tell me that the distance cannot be walked in the time?" asked Mr. Jerningham, desperately.

The answer was decisive. Captain Barclay himself could not have walked from Halko's Head to Killalochie within the given period. The hardiest of these villagers were careful, at this time of year, to start an hour before the turn of the tide. The more cautious among these good folks left Halko's Head as soon as the ebbing waves left a dry path upon the sand.

"Then he is doomed!" Mr. Jerningham said to himself. "But what is his doom to me? I am not his keeper."

He did his uttermost, however, towards the rescue of the unwary pedestrian from the peril he had tempted. To the fishermen he offered a noble reward should they succeed in saving the imprudent stranger. The men ran to their boats, and in five minutes had pushed off, and were making all the way they could against a heavy sea. But those who stayed behind told Mr. Jerningham that the chances were against the boats overtaking the pedestrian, if he were anything of a walker. They told him there was a stiff wind blowing from the land, and it was as much as the rowers could do to make any way against it. This, indeed, he could see for himself, and those dark clouds in the windward quarter boded ill. Mr. Jerningham lingered for some time, talking with the two men who had stayed on shore. He questioned them closely as to the measures to be taken for the rescue of the stranger; and they assured him that in sending the boats he had done all that mortal aid could do.

With this assurance he was obliged to be satisfied. What could it matter to him whether Eustace Thorburn lived or died; or would not the young man's untimely end be for his advantage? He had seen, the day before, only too plainly, that all his patient devotion, his watchful anxiety to please her, had not made him as dear to Helen de Bergerac as this hired secretary had become without an effort. And all the old envy, and the old anger had returned to Harold Jerningham's breast as he made this discovery.

"Will she lament his death?" he asked himself, "or is her love for him only a girlish fancy that will perish with its object? She seemed tolerably happy in his absence, and I hoped she had completely forgotten him, and was learning to love me. Why should I not win her love? And he comes back, and in the first

moment of his return I discover that I have been building on sand. The divine attraction of youth is with my rival, and all my dreams and all my hopes are so much foolishness and self-delusion."

This is what Mr. Jerningham thought as he rode across the barren hills towards Killalochie, whither he went as fast as his horse could carry him, but not faster than the dark storm-clouds which overtook him half-way, and drenched him with heavy rain. The sky grew black as Erebus, and looking seaward every now and then, he saw the breakers leap and whiten as they rolled in.

That common humanity which prompts a man to help his direst foe in extreme peril, made Mr. Jerningham eager to reach Killalochie. There, perhaps, he might find he had been deceived by the gloomy presages of the fishermen, or thence he might send other means to help the missing traveller. He rode up to the little inn an hour after leaving Halko's Head. M. de Bergerac and his daughter had arrived some time before, and Mr. Jerningham was informed that dinner would be served immediately.

"Put it off for a quarter of an hour," he said to the servant, "and do not let my friend or his daughter know of my arrival. I want to see the landlord on most urgent business."

The landlord was in the bar, talking to a portly, middle-aged gentleman, who was lounging against an angle of the wall, smoking a cigar.

"I really wish my nephew were safe in this house," said this person, "for I think we are in for a rough night."

Mr. Jerningham told the landlord of his fears, and asked whether the walk from Halko's Head to Killalochie by the sands were indeed as perilous as it had been represented by the fisherman.

The landlord confirmed all he had heard.

"Is there anything to be done?" cried Mr. Jerningham; "a gentleman, whom I met at Halko's Head, set out to walk here at the turn of the tide. I sent boats after him, but the men seemed to fear the result."

"From Halko's Head," exclaimed the lounger, taking his cigar from his mouth, and staring aghast at Harold Jerningham. "I expect my nephew from Halko's Head. Do you know the name of the man you met there?"

"He is my friend's secretary, Mr. Thorburn."

"O God," cried Daniel, "it's my boy!"

For a few moments he leant against the wall, helpless, and white as death. In the next instant he called upon them hoarsely to help him, to follow him, and ran bare-headed from the house.

"Who is that man?" asked Mr. Jerningham.

"He's fra the south, sir; Mayfield by name."

"Mayfield!" muttered the questioner, "Of *her* blood."

Daniel Mayfield came back to the inn. "Is no one going to help me?" he cried. "Are you going to let my sister's son perish, and not stir a foot to save him?"

The landlord caught Daniel's strong arm in his own muscular grip.

"You joost keep y'rsel quiet," he said. "It's no guid to fast y'rsel. Whatever mon can dee, I'll dee. It is'na runnin' wild in the street as'll save y'r nevy. I ken the place, and I ken what to be doin'. Leave it to me."

"Yes," said Mr. Jerningham, huskily; "you can do nothing. Let the good man manage things his own way. And mind, my friend, I will guarantee fifty pounds to the man who saves Eustace Thorburn. I want to speak to you, Mr. Mayfield. Come in here." He opened the door of a little sitting-room, and would have led Daniel in; but Daniel shook off his grasp roughly.

"Do you think I can talk of anything while *his* life is in peril?" he cried.

"Yes, you can—you must talk of *him*. I tell you that your help is not wanted. You can do nothing. The men, who know the coast, will do their utmost. Come! I must and will be answered."

He half led, half dragged, Daniel Mayfield into the little room. The journalist was much the stronger man of the two, but at this moment he was helpless as a child.

"Your name is Mayfield? You do not know what feelings *that* name awakens in my mind, heard in this place, and after my meeting that young man where I did meet him this morning. For God's sake tell me if you are any ways related to a Mr. Mayfield who——"

"My father kept a circulating library at Bayham," answered Daniel, with angry abruptness. "I am a journalist, and get my bread by scribbling for newspapers and reviews."

"And that young man—Eustace Thorburn—is your sister's son? You must have had more than one sister?"

"No, I had but one."

"And she is dead?"

"She is."

"And this young man—Eustace Thorburn—is the son of your sister, Mrs. Thorburn?"

"He is the son of my only sister, Celia Mayfield."

"His father—Mr. Thorburn—is dead, I suppose?"

"I can answer no questions about his father," answered Daniel, sternly; "nor do I care to be catechized in this manner at such a time."

"Pardon me. Your name has painful associations for me, and I thought it possible you might be related to——One question more, and I have done. In what year was your nephew born?"

"He was born on the 14th November, 1844."

"Then he is not twenty-four years of age. You are quite sure of the date?"

"I am; and if you care to verify it, you may find the registry of his baptism in St. Ann's Church, Soho."

"Thanks. That is all I have to ask. Forgive me if I seem impertinent. And now let us go to the jetty together; and God grant this young man may come back to us in safety."

Daniel uttered no pious aspiration. There are terrors too profound for words—periods of anguish in which a man cannot even pray. He followed Harold Jerningham out of the house, both men pale as death, and with an awful quiet fallen upon them. They went silently down to the little wooden jetty where the fishing-boats were moored.

The tide was at the flood, the rain driving against their pale, awe-stricken faces, the waters leaping and plunging against the timbers of the jetty. Nothing could be more hopeless than the outlook.

The landlord of the inn was there. He had sent off a boat's crew in search of the missing stranger.

"How do we know that he has not returned by some other way?" asked Mr. Jerningham; while Daniel Mayfield stood, statue-like, staring seaward.

The men pointed significantly to the perpendicular cliffs on each side of the jetty. The only cleft in these grim barriers, for miles along the coast, was that opening in which the little harbour and jetty had been made. Only by this way could the traveller have approached the village, and no traveller had come this way since the turning of the tide. This was the gist of what the men told Harold Jerningham, in cautious undertones, while Daniel Mayfield still stood, statue-like and unlistening, staring out at the roaring waste of waves.

There the two men waited for upwards of an hour. The rain fell throughout that dreary interval. Mr. Jerningham paced slowly to and fro the little jetty. He could scarcely have recalled another occasion upon which he had exposed himself thus to the assaults of those persistent levellers, the elements, but he was barely conscious of the rain that drifted in his face, and drenched his garments. The greatest mental shock that had ever befallen this man had come upon him to-day. A revelation the most startling had been made to him: and with that strange revealment bitter regret, vain remorse, had taken possession of his mind. He had borne himself with sufficient

calmness in his interview with Daniel Mayfield, but the tempest within was not easily to be stilled. As he paced the jetty, he tried to reason with himself, to take a calm survey of the day's events, but he tried in vain. All his thoughts travelled in a circle, and perpetually returned to the same point.

"I have a son," he said to himself; and then, with a sudden shudder, and a glance of horror towards the pitiless sea, he told himself, "I *had* a son."

While he walked thus to and fro, oblivious alike of Daniel Mayfield and of the patient, lounging fishermen, Daniel came suddenly to him, and laid a strong hand upon his shoulder.

"Where is my nephew?" he asked. "Where is my only sister's only child? You saw him at Halko's Head this morning, and parted with him there. Why did you let him return by the perilous route, while you travelled safely?"

"I did not know the danger of the road. I took prompt measures enough when I discovered the hazard. I sent two boats from Halko's Head in search of your nephew. Please God, he may return in one of them!"

"Amen!" cried Daniel, solemnly; and then, for the first time, he seemed to awake from the stupor that had come upon him with the dread horror of his kinsman's peril. He began to question the men closely as to the distance between the two places, and the time in which the boats might be expected to make the voyage. By the showing of the fishermen, the boats were already due.

After these questions and calculations, the watchers relapsed into silence. Daniel still stood looking seaward, but no longer with the blank stare of stupefaction. He watched the waves now with eagerness—nay, even with hope.

The night closed in, cold, wet, and stormy, while he watched, and by and by, through the thick darkness, and above the roar of the waves, came the voices of the boatmen, calling to the men on the jetty.

One of these men had lighted a lantern, and swung it aloft to a mast, at the end of the rough landing-place. By the red glimmer of this light Daniel Mayfield saw the boats coming in, and the faces of the men looking upward, but no face he knew. The wonder is that humanity can survive such anguish. He called to the men hoarsely,—

"Is he found?"

"No."

Short phrases best fit such announcements.

"There is the boat that set out from here," murmured Mr. Jerningham; "he may be picked up by that."

"Not if these have failed to find him. These men had the

start by an hour and a half, and have come close along the shore. Oh, damnable, ravenous waves, roar your loudest for evermore, and overwhelm this miserable earth!—You have swallowed up my bo-'"

He fell on his knees, and beat his forehead against the rough timber rail of the jetty. In broad daylight he would, perhaps, have shown himself a stoic; but in the darkness, and amidst the thunder of the stormy sea, he abandoned himself to his despair

Nor did Mr. Jerningham attempt to console him. To him also the return of the boats had brought despair, but he betrayed his grief by no passionate word or gesture.

"I had a son," he said to himself; "a son borne to me by the only woman who ever loved me with completely pure and disinterested love; and I never looked upon his infant sleep; I never shared his boyish confidence; and I met him in the pride of his manhood and hated him because he was bright, and young, hopeful, and like myself at my best. And I put myself between him and the girl who loved him,—I, his father,—and tried to steal her heart away from him. O God! to think of his uncherished childhood, his uncared-for boyhood, his friendless manhood! My only son! And I have squandered thousands on old coins, I have locked up the cost of half a dozen university educations in doubtful intaglios. My son! made after my own image—my very self—the reproduction of my youth at its brightest—the incarnation of my hopes and dreams when they were purest! O Celia! this is the vengeance which Fate exacts for the wrongs of the forgiving. Here, on this dreary shore, which that poor girl fled from in her despair—here, after four-and-twenty years, the hour of retribution sounds, and the penalty is exacted!"

Thus ran Harold Jerningham's thoughts as he waited for the return of the boat that was still away on its vain, desperate errand. It came back too soon, a lantern at the prow gleaming bright through the rainy darkness. No, the men had found no one—no trace of the missing wanderer.

"What if he went back to the Halko's Head by the sands, and is kept there by stress of weather?" cried Daniel, suddenly; "there is that one chance left. O God! it is but a chance. What vehicle can I get to take me to that place? I must go at once!"

"There is the horse I rode this morning," said Mr. Jerningham. "I will go to Halko's Head."

"Why should you do my duty?" asked Daniel, angrily. "Do you think I am afraid of a strange road or a shower of rain, when I have to go in search of my dead sister's son?"

To this Mr. Jerningham made no reply. He would fain have

gone himself to the fishing village on the headland, to see if, by any happy chance, Eustace had returned thither. But he, Harold Jerningham, had no right to put himself forward in this search. Acknowledged tie between him and the missing man there was none. He could only submit to the natural desire of Daniel Mayfield.

Upon inquiry, it appeared that the landlord of the "William Wallace" inn possessed a vehicle, which he spoke of vaguely, as a "wee bit giggy," and which, with the sturdy steed that drew it, was very much at the service of Mr. Mayfield. A hanger-on of the inn could drive the gentleman to Halko's Head, and would guarantee his safe conduct thither, and safe return to Killalochie, despite of the darkness and foul weather.

Daniel was only too glad to accept the offer, and in ten minutes the gig—a lumbering, obsolete vehicle of the hooded species, on two gigantic wheels—was ready for departure. The driver clambered into his seat, Daniel followed, and the big, bony horse, and clumsy carriage went splashing and plunging through the night.

Mr. Jerningham stood at the inn-door, watching its departure. Then, for the first time since his arrival at the humble hostelry, he thought of the dinner that had been prepared for him, and the friends with whom he was to have eaten it.

He went up to the sitting-room, where he found Helen alone, waiting the return of her father, who had gone down to the harbour. She sat in a meditative attitude, anxious and dispirited. Some hint of the ghastly truth had reached this room, in spite of Mr. Jerningham's precautions, and Theodore de Bergerac had gone out to ascertain the extent of the calamity.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!" cried Helen, eagerly, as he entered the room. "You can tell us the truth about this dreadful rumour. The people here say that there has been some one—a stranger—lost on the sands to-night. Is it true?"

"My dear Helen, I——" Mr. Jerningham began, but the girl stopped him, with a faint shriek of horror.

"Yes, it is true," she cried; "your face tells me that. It is deadly white. Is there no hope? Is the traveller really lost?"

"It would be too soon to suppose that," answered Mr. Jerningham, with calmness that cost him no small effort. "The whole business may be only a false alarm. The young man may have chosen another path. After all, no one *saw* him go down to the sands. There is no cause for despair."

M. de Bergerac came into the room at this moment. He, too, was ghastly pale.

"This is dreadful, Jerningham," he said. "There is every reason to fear this poor young fellow has been drowned. I have

been talking to the men on the jetty—men who know every foot of the coast—and they tell me, if he went by the sands, there is no hope. Poor fellow!"

"Papa, in what a tone you speak of him!" cried Helen. "It is natural you should be sorry for a stranger, but you speak as if you had known this young man—and there are so few travellers in this part of Scotland. Oh, for pity's sake, tell me!" she exclaimed, looking piteously from one to the other, with clasped hands. "Did you know him? did we know him? Your secretary was in this neighbourhood yesterday, papa, and was to meet his uncle here at Killaloghie. Oh, no, no, no! it cannot be him. It cannot be Eustace Thorburn!"

"Dear child, for God's sake restrain yourself. There is no certainty—there is always hope until the worst is known'"

"It *is* Eustace Thorburn," cried Helen. "Neither of you will deny that."

A stifled shriek broke from her lips, and she fell senseless, stretched at the feet of her father and Harold Jerningham.

"How she loves him!" murmured Mr. Jerningham, as he bent over her, and assisted her father in carrying her to the adjoining room. "So ends my dream!"

At midnight the lumbering, hooded gig returned with Daniel Mayfield—and despair. He had been into every dwelling-place at Halko's Head, had roused drowsy fishermen from their beds, but no trace or tidings of Eustace Thorburn had reached that lonely village. He came back when all possible means of finding the lost had been exhausted.

Mr. Jerningham was up, and watching for him. More than this had he done. He had hired a couple of men, provided with lanterns, who were ready in the inn, prepared to accompany Harold Jerningham and Daniel Mayfield on an exploration of the coast, for the tide was now out. The rain had ceased, and faint stars glimmered here and there on the cloudy sky.

"Will you go down to the sands with these men and me?" asked Mr. Jerningham, when Daniel had described his bootless errand.

To this proposal Daniel assented, almost mechanically. In his utter despair he had ceased to wonder why Harold Jerningham should take so keen an interest in his nephew's peril. He was glad to do anything—he knew not, cared not what—that seemed like action. But since his useless journey to Halko's Head hope had left him.

They went down to the sands and wandered there for hours, examining every turn and angle of the rugged cliff that towered above them, dark and gloomy as the wall of some fortress-prison. The exploration only strengthened their despair. Against that iron-bound coast how many a helpless wretch must have been

crushed to death! Between the swift advancing wall of waters, and that perpendicular boundary, what was there for the traveller but a grave! They pored upon the sand, lighted by the fitful glare of the lanterns, looking for some trace of the lost—handkerchief, a glove, a purse, a scrap of paper—but they found no such token.

Harold Jerningham remembered the yellow wild-flowers which the young man had put in his breast. With those poor memorials of his mother's youth he had gone to his untimely death.

"If the superstitions of priests have any foundation, and my son and I shall meet before the judgment-throne, surely I shall see those wild-flowers in his hand," thought Mr. Jerningham, as he remembered the last look of the bright young face which had been said to resemble his own.

He thought also of such a night as this four-and-twenty years ago, when he had searched the same coast with terror in his mind. Then his fears had been wasted. Oh, that it might be so now!

They paced the dreary sands until daybreak, and for an hour after daybreak; and by that time the tide was rolling in again, and they had to hasten back to the little harbour. As the fierce waves dashed shorewards with a hoarse roar, each of the explorers thought how the missing traveller had been thus overtaken by the same devouring monsters, savagely bent upon destruction to mankind. In that hour Daniel Mayfield conceived a detestation of the sea—a horror and hatred of those black, rolling waves, as ministers of death and desolation, deadliest foes to human weakness and human love.

With daybreak, and the beginning of a new day, came a despair even more terrible than that of the long, dark night. Blank and chill was the dawn of that miserable day. All had been done. Human love, human effort, could do no more, except to repeat again and again the same plan of action that had proved so hopeless.

If Eustace Thorburn had taken that fatal path under the cliffs, he had inevitably gone to his death. Of that the people who knew the coast said there could be no doubt. If he had changed his mind at the last moment, and set off in some other direction, why did he not return to Killalochie? Was it likely that he, at all times so thoughtful of others, would show himself on this occasion utterly indifferent to his uncle's feelings, reckless what anxiety he caused him?

Upon that dreary day there was nothing but watching and waiting for the little party at the "William Wallace" inn. Helen and her father sat alone in their room, the girl pale as marble, but very calm, and with a sweet resignation of manner, which seemed to indicate her regret for that outbreak of passionate

sorrow on the previous night. Little was said between the father and daughter, but Theodore de Bergerac's affection showed itself on this bitter day by a supreme tenderness of tone and manner. Once only did they speak of the subject that filled the minds of both.

"My darling," said Theodore, "it is too soon to abandon hope."

"Oh, papa! I cannot hope, but I have prayed. All through the long night I prayed for my old companion and friend. You think I have no right to be so sorry for him. You do not know how good he was to me all the time we were together. No brother could have been kinder to a favourite sister."

"And you shall weep for him and pray for him, as you would for a brother," answered the father, tenderly, "with grief as pure, with prayers as holy. Happy the man who has such an intercessor!"

After this they sat in pensive silence, unconscious of the progress of time, but with the feeling that the day was prolonged to infinite duration. It was like the day of a funeral; and yet, a lurking sense of tremulous expectancy fluttered the hearts of those silent mourners. A step on the stair, the sudden sound of voices at the inn-door, threw Helen into a fever. Sometimes she half rose from her chair, pale, breathless, listening. The cry almost broke from her lips, "He is here!" But the footstep passed by—the voice that for the moment sounded familiar grew strange—and she knew that her hopes had deluded her. It is so difficult for youth not to hope. The waves could not have devoured so much genius, so much goodness. Even pitiless ocean must needs be too merciful to destroy Eustace Thorburn. Some such thought as this lurked in Helen's mind.

While Theodore de Bergerac and his daughter sat alone, absorbed in this one bitter anxiety, Daniel Mayfield wandered helplessly to and fro between the "William Wallace" and the harbour, or the road to Halko's Head—now going one way, now another, but continually returning to the inn-door, to ask, with a countenance that was piteous in its assumed tranquillity, if anything had been heard of the missing man.

The answer was always the same—nothing had been heard. The landlord, and some of the hangers-on of the inn, tried to comfort Daniel with feeble suggestions as to what the young man might have done with himself. Others made no attempt to hide their gloomy convictions.

"It isn't the first time a stranger has lost his life on those sands," they said, in their northern patois. "Folks that have gone to see St. Kentigern's Cave, and would go without a guide, have paid dearly for their folly."

Daniel Mayfield scarcely heard this remark about the cave. The fears, or indeed the certainties, of these people could

scarcely be darker than his own. He told himself that he should never look upon his nephew's living face again.

"Dead I may see him—the dear, bright face beaten and bruised against those hellish cliffs; but living, never more; oh, never more! my more than son—my pride—my hope—my love!"

And then he remembered how he had hoped to hold his nephew's children in his arms. He had almost felt the soft clinging hands upon his neck.

"I was created to end my days as old Uncle Dan," he had said to himself.

Now the day-dream was gone. This brighter life, in which he had found it so easy to renew his own youth, was broken off untimely—this dear companionship, which had made him a boy, was taken from him. Down to dusty death he must tramp alone, between a lane of printer's devils clamorous for copy, and insatiable editors for ever demanding that each denunciatory leader, or scathing review, or Juvenalistic onslaught on the social vices of his day, should be racier and more trenchant than the last.

His nephew taken from him, there remained to Daniel nothing but tavern friends, and the dull round of daily labour, and old age, cheerless, lonely, creeping towards him apace, athwart the dust and turmoil of his life.

While Daniel walked, purposeless, on the dreary road, or stood listless, and hopeless, on the quiet jetty, Harold Jerningham sat alone in his own apartment, and pondered on the events that had befallen him.

A son, found and lost—found only in the very hour of his loss. What chastisement of offended God—or blind, unconscious destiny, gigantic Nemesis, with mighty, brazen arms, revolving, machine-like, on its pivot, striking at random into space, and striking *sometimes* strangely to the purpose—what chastisement could have seemed more fitting than this?

"I would have bartered half my fortune, or twenty years of my life, for a son," he said to himself. "How often I have envied the field-labourer his troop of rosy brats—the gipsy-tramp her brown-faced baby! Fate put a barren sceptre in my hand. If my wife had given me a son, I think I should have loved her. And I had a son all the time—a son whom I might have legitimated, since his mother lived as my acknowledged wife on this Scottish ground. Yes, I would have set the lawyers to work, and we would have made him heir of Greenlands, and Ripley, and Pendarvoch. I would have given him the girl who loves him—whom I have loved. It would be no shame to resign her to my son—my younger, better self. And we met—that unknown son and I—and we held scornfully aloof from each

other, with instinctive dislike. Dislike? It was dislike which needed but a word to melt into love. In a stranger, this reflection of my youth was an impertinence—a plagiarism. In my son it must be the strongest claim upon my love. My son! It needs not the agreement of dates to confirm his kindred. His paternity is written upon his face."

And then to Mr. Jerningham also there came the thought that had come to Daniel Mayfield. That face in life he was never more to see. Should he even look upon it in death—changed, disfigured by the fierce destruction of the waves. Even to see it thus was almost too much to hope. To reclaim the dead, so lost, would be well-nigh as impossible as it had been to save the living.

CHAPTER XLI.

STRONGER THAN DEATH.

The day that followed was even more utterly blank and hopeless than the last. Mr. Jerningham had sent scouts in every direction, and both from him and Daniel the men had received promises of liberal reward for any tidings of the lost one. But no tidings came. The men returned, dispirited and weary; and at the close of this second blank, wasted day, fairly confessed that they could do no more.

So the night closed; and the sleepless hours wore away in a house of mourning and desolation.

During these two days Mr. Jerningham and Helen de Bergerac had not met. The girl had retired when her father's friend entered the sitting-room which they shared in common. She shrank from seeing him after that moment of anguish in which she had betrayed the secret which, of all others, she would most jealously have guarded. She now avoided Mr. Jerningham, and he guessed the reason of her avoidance. Nor did her father attempt to conceal the truth.

"You were wiser than I, dear friend," he said, "when you warned me against the peril of that young man's residence in our home. Only the night before his unhappy disappearance he made a confession of his love for my darling, and pleaded his cause with me, with all possible humility, and with very little hope of acceptance, I am sure."

"And you rejected his suit?"

"What else could I do? In the first place I considered myself pledged to you. I had no brighter hope than that you should win my daughter's love, and I believed her heart to be free. In the second place, this young man—for whom I have a real affection—could offer no security for my dear girl's happi-

ness, except his love; and if my son [illegible] this idea that true love will [illegible] and [illegible]—and [illegible]. No, I gave Eustace a [illegible], and he [illegible] hearted."

"Did Helen know of his appeal to you?"

"Not a syllable. Nor did I [illegible] that letter would that he had made so fatal an impression on her mind. I see now that it is so, and fear that his untimely doom will only render the impression more lasting."

"Yes," replied Mr. Jernyngham, gravely; "that is a thing to be dreaded. My dear friend, do not think of my disappointment, though I will own to you without shame that it is a bitter one. The dream was so bright. Let us think only of this dear girl's happiness, or if that cannot be secured, her peace of mind. Would it not be wise to remove her from this scene as soon as possible?"

"Decidedly; she broods perpetually upon that poor young man's fate, and is kept in a fever of expectation by the hope of tidings which I fear will never come. Yes, it would certainly be better to take her away."

"That is easily done. You can take her to Penderwoh. We are expected there, you know. I will remain here a day or two longer for the last feeble chance of the missing man's reappearance, and will then follow you. We are only fifty miles from Penderwoh, and you can manage the journey easily with a change of horses. Shall I order the carriage for to-morrow morning?"

"If you please. I will talk to Helen about the arrangement. I do not think she can object."

"If she does, you must do your utmost to overrule her objections. Be sure that it is of vital importance to remove her from this scene of gloom and terror. Believe me, I am influenced by no selfish motive when I ask you to take her to Penderwoh. If that young man should be restored to us, I will bring him there to her. He shall plead to you again, and this time shall not be rejected."

"Harold!"

"Yes, you think me mad, no doubt. For my own part, I can only wonder that I am not mad. I tell you, if Eustace Thorburn comes forth from the jaws of death, he shall come to you a new creature—with new hopes, new ambitions—perhaps even a new name. Oh, for pity's sake do not oppose me. Wait till we know the issue of this [illegible] quietly."

"My dear Harold, you astound me. I thought you disliked my secretary, and you speak of him with emotion that seems foreign to your very nature. The [illegible] extraordinary."

"The circumstances that have brought about the change are not ordinary circumstances. I say again, for God's sake do not

question me. Prepare Helen for the journey. I will go and give the necessary orders. Good night!"

The two men shook hands, and Harold Jerningham departed, leaving his old friend sorely perplexed by his conduct.

"What a heart that man conceals under an affectation of cynicism!" thought Theodore de Bergerac. "He is immeasurably distressed by the untimely fate of a man whom he pretended to dislike."

M. de Bergerac called his daughter from the adjoining room. She came to him, deadly pale, but with the sweet air of resignation that made her beauty so pathetic.

"My darling," said her father, tenderly, "Mr. Jerningham wishes us to leave this sad place early to-morrow morning, for Pendarvoch, where we are hourly expected. He will remain here some days longer, in the hope of obtaining some tidings about poor Eustace; but he wishes us to leave immediately. You have no objection to this arrangement, have you, dearest?"

"I had rather we stayed here, papa."

"But, my dear girl, what good can you and I do here?"

"None, oh, none! But I had much rather we stayed."

"My child, it is so useless."

"Oh, papa, I know that," she answered, piteously. "I know we can do nothing, except pray for him, and I do pray for him without ceasing; but to go away—to abandon the place where he has been lost—it seems so cruel, so cowardly."

"But, my darling! the place will not be abandoned. Mr. Jerningham will remain here, and will omit no effort to discover our poor friend's fate. His uncle, Mr. Mayfield, will be here. What could we do that they will not do better?"

"I know that, dear father! I know we can do nothing. But let me stay. I loved him so dearly!"

The words slipped from her lips unawares, and she stood before her father, blushing crimson.

"Oh, papa! you must think me so bold and unwomanly," she said. "Till this sorrow came upon us I did not know that I loved him. I did not know how dear he had become to me in the happy, tranquil days at home. When he left us, I felt there was a blank in my life, somehow, except when I was with you. But I thought no more than this. It was only when I heard that he was lost to us for ever that I knew how truly I loved him."

"And he loved you, darling, as truly and as fondly!" answered the father, hiding the blushing face upon his breast.

"Did he tell you that, papa?"

"He did. The night before he started on that fatal excursion. And now, dearest girl! be brave, and let me take you from this place, where your presence can do no possible good."

"I will, dear father—if you will first grant me one favour."

"What is that?"

"Let me see the place where he perished. Take me to the sands along which he was to come, and upon which he must have met his death."

"My darling! what good can that do?"

"Oh, none, perhaps," cried Helen, impatiently; "but it is just the one thing that can reconcile me to leaving this place. If he had died a natural death, and been buried among the quiet dead, I should ask you to take me to his grave, and you could not refuse. I ask you almost the same thing now. Let me look upon the scene of his death!"

"It shall be so, Helen," replied Theodore, gravely, "though I fear I shall do wrong in yielding to such a wish."

"My darling father! Then you will go with me to the sands to-morrow at low tide? You will inquire the time at which we ought to go?"

"I will do anything foolish for your sake! But, Helen, when I have done this you will go with me to Pendarvoch quietly?"

"You shall take me where you please."

Later in the evening M. de Bergerac saw Harold Jerningham, ascertained the hour of the turning tide, and arranged the counter-ordering of the carriage. At noon, they told him, the tide would be within an hour of turning, and any ordinary walker, starting for Halko's Head at that time, might arrive there with ease and safety.

"Helen and I want to see the coast with our own eyes," said M. de Bergerac, anxious to shield his daughter's weakness in some measure by affecting to share her wish; "so before we leave this place we have determined to explore the way by which that poor fellow must have come."

"Helen!—Will she go with you?"

"Why not? She, too, would like to see this fatal coast."

"A strange fancy."

"It may be wiser to indulge it."

"Be it so. But the distance to Halko's Head by the coast is seven miles. Helen can hardly walk so far."

"I think on this occasion she could do so."

"I will go with you, and we will take a boat in which she can complete the journey, should she feel tired."

At noon next day they started—Helen, her father, and Harold Jerningham—attended by a couple of rowers, in a roomy boat. Helen would have infinitely preferred to be alone with her father, but she could not advance any objection to Mr. Jerningham's companionship, and was indeed grateful to him for not opposing her wish.

She walked by her father in silence, with her hand clinging to his arm, and her eyes lifted every now and then to the steep

cliffs above them, unsurmountable, eternal barrier between the sands and the heights above. The day was bright and clear, and the April sunlight shone upon a tranquil sea. Darkness and rain, storm and wind, had overtaken that missing traveller,—against him the very elements had conspired.

The little party went slowly along the sands, with the boat always in sight. Little satisfaction could there be in that melancholy survey. The cliffs and the shore told nothing of him who had perished amidst their awful solitude. At what spot the rising wall of waters had overtaken him no one could tell. Midway between Killalochie and Halko's Head they came to the inlet or clift in the cliffs, a narrow passage or chasm, between steep walls of crag, about a quarter of a mile in length. Here the walking was difficult, and Harold Jerningham endeavoured to dissuade Helen from exploring the place.

"Mr. Mayfield and I went down there with our lanterns," he said. "Believe me, there has been no trace, not the faintest indication overlooked. The ground is so thickly scattered with sharp craggy stones as to be almost impassable."

In spite of this, Helen persisted, with a quiet resolution, which impressed Mr. Jerningham. This pure, country-bred girl was even more admirable than he had thought her. The calm, still face, so fixed and yet so gentle, assumed a new beauty in his eyes.

"The good blood shows itself," he thought.

They all three went into the chasm. Only in the red fitful glare of the lanterns had Mr. Jerningham seen it before. It had seemed to him then more vast, more awful; but even by day the depth and solitude of the place had a gloomy solemnity. Very carefully had the searchers, with their lanterns, examined every angle and recess of the cliff on either side, every inch of the stony ground, looking for some trace of the lost, and had found nothing. To-day Mr. Jerningham walked listlessly, scarce looking to the right or the left, hoping nothing, fearing nothing.

M. de Bergerac's thoughts were absorbed by his daughter. It was her face he watched, her grief he feared. Thus was it left to the eyes of that one mourner to catch the first sign of hope. A loud cry burst from her lips, a cry that thrilled the hearts of her companions.

"Helen, my love, what is it?" exclaimed her father, clasping her tightly in his arms.

She broke from him, and pointed upwards. "Look!" she cried. "Look! There is some one there. He is there! Alive or dead, he is found!"

They looked upwards in the direction to which she pointed, and there, fluttering in the fresh April wind, they saw something—a rag—a white handkerchief—hanging from the dark mouth of a hollow in the cliff.

This hollow in the cliff was about twelve feet above the sand, and at first sight appeared utterly inaccessible.

"He is there!" cried Helen; "I am sure he is there!"

"Yes," said Mr. Jerningham, examining the face of the cliff; "there are niches cut here for foothold. Why, this must be the Saint's Cave of which they have told us. Yes, finding himself overtaken by the tide, he *might* have taken refuge here. It is just possible he might clamber to that opening."

"I know he was distinguished as a gymnast in Belgium," said M. de Bergerac, eagerly.

"I will run back and fetch the boatmen," said Mr. Jerningham; "they are waiting for us yonder."

He pointed to the opening in the cliff, and hastened thither.

"Holà!" shouted Theodore, "art thou up yonder, dear boy?"

Helen fell on her knees among the rough stones and wet seaweed.

"Oh! merciful Father, restore him to us!" she cried, with clasped hands. "Hear our prayers, oh, Giver of all good things; and give him back to us."

Her father watched her with tearful eyes. "My darling," he said, raising her in his arms, "we must not hope too much. For pity's sake, be firm. That handkerchief may mean nothing; or, if—if he is there, he may be no less lost to us."

"Call to him again, dear father. Tell him we are here."

"Holà!" shouted the Frenchman. "Eustace, if you are up yonder, answer your friends. Holà!"

Again and again he repeated the call, but there was no answer.

"How long they are coming—how long!" cried Helen, looking despairingly towards the sea.

As she spoke, Mr. Jerningham reappeared in the opening of the cliff, with the two boatmen. They came running towards the cave, one of them carrying a rope. Both were barefooted; and to them the scaling of St. Kentigern's Cave was a small affair. But each opined that for a Southron it would be a difficult business.

"A man can do desperate things when he is fighting for his life," replied Mr. Jerningham. "How is it that this cave was overlooked in our search?"

The men replied, rather vaguely, that the cave was too unlikely a place to search. They might as well have looked on the top of the cliffs.

While Mr. Jerningham asked this question, one of the boatmen stuck his boathook into the cliff, and by the aid of this and the foothold cut in the craggy surface, clambered, cat-like, to

the mouth of the little cave, and hung there, peering into the darkness.

"There's something here," he said; and on this the second boatman, at Mr. Jerningham's order, mounted on his shoulders, and hoisted his comrade into the cavern.

There was a pause, an awful interval of hope and terror, and then the boatman shouted to his mate below to lend a hand there, and in the next instant a limp, lifeless figure, in dust-whitened clothes, was thrust from the narrow mouth of the cave and lowered gently into the boatman's sturdy arms. But not unaided did the boatman receive his burden; Mr. Jerningham's arms were extended to assist in receiving that helpless form; Mr. Jerningham's hands laid it gently upon Helen's shawl, which she had flung off and cast upon the ground a moment before.

Dead or alive? For some moments that was a moot question. Harold Jerningham knelt beside the prostrate figure, with his head bent low upon its breast.

"Thank God!" he said quietly, with his hand upon the young man's heart. "It *does* beat. He tried to feel the pulse, but a faint groan broke from the white lips as he lifted the wrist.

"His arm is broken," said Mr. Jerningham, in the same quiet tone; and then he turned to Helen, with a sudden burst of feeling. "It is you who found him," he cried; "I dedicate his life to you."

At any other moment such words might have provoked interrogation; but this was a time in which the wildest words pass unquestioned.

The two boatmen, aided always by Mr. Jerningham, carried the lifeless figure to the boat, where it was gently laid upon a bed, composed of a folded sail, an overcoat, and Helen's shawl, against the rejection of which she pleaded piteously.

"Indeed, I am warmly dressed; I do not want it," she said.

Mr. Jerningham seated himself in the boat, with his son's head upon his knees. He looked down wonderingly at the pale, still face, so wan and haggard with pain. It was so difficult to comprehend his own feelings, and the change that had come upon him, since he had known that this young man was *his*.

"My rival," he said to himself. "No, not my rival. My representative. The image I can show to the world, and say, 'This is what I was!'"

Before they reached the inn at Killalochie, the village knew that the lost had been found. Scouts had posted off from the jetty with the happy tidings, before the boatmen could carry their burden on shore. He was found—alive. Every one seemed to know this by instinct. Half-way between the jetty and the

inn, Daniel Mayfield met them, staggering like a drunken man, pale as a corpse.

He hung over the unconscious man with womanly fondness He pushed Harold Jerningham aside, and asserted his right to his kinsman.

"Let no one stand between me and my boy," he cried, huskily.

Scouts rushed to fetch the village surgeon, other scouts bade the landlady prepare her best room. All the common business of life was suspended in favour of this one stranger, snatched from the jaws of death.

They carried him to the best room, which happened to be Mr. Jerningham's room, and here he was laid, still unconscious, upon his father's bed.

The local surgeon came, a feeble old man, in spectacles, and sounded and examined the prostrate form, while Daniel Mayfield and Harold Jerningham stood by in agony. The latter hurried from the room, sent for his servant, bade him mount one of the carriage-horses, and gallop to the station, thence by first train to Aberdeen, where he was to find and bring back the best surgeon in the place.

"You'll say he is wanted for Mr. Jerningham, of Pendarvooh," he told the man, who made haste to obey his orders.

The local surgeon had by this time discovered that there was a broken arm, and was eager to set it. But this Mr. Jerningham interfered to prevent.

"I have sent to Aberdeen for another surgeon," he said; "and I would rather you should wait until you have his co-operation. Don't you think it would be as well to apply a cooling lotion, in the meanwhile, to reduce that swelling? It would be quite impossible to set the bone while the arm and shoulder are in that swollen state."

To this the local surgeon assented, with an air of profound wisdom, and in the broadest Scotch; after which he departed to prepare the lotion, leaving Harold Jerningham and Daniel Mayfield face to face beside the bed.

"How was he found?" asked Daniel.

Whereon Mr. Jerningham told the story of Helen's walk and St. Kentigern's Cave.

"God bless her!" exclaimed Daniel; "and you too, for your interest in this poor boy's fate. He once told me you disliked him. He must have wronged you."

"I do not know that. I have been a creature of whims and prejudices, and may have been prejudiced even against him."

"I thank you so much the more for your goodness in this crisis," answered Daniel, with deep feeling. "And now we need burden you with our troubles no longer. He lives! That one great fact is almost enough for me. I will fight Death

hand to hand beside his bed. He is the only thing I love in this world, and I will do battle for my treasure."

He glanced towards the door, as much as to say, "Let me be alone with my nephew."

Mr. Jerningham understood the look, and answered it.

"You must not banish me from this room," he said; "I claim the right to share your watch."

"On what ground?"

"By the right of a father."

"A father's right!" cried Daniel, with a bitter laugh; "that boy has no father. He does not know so much as his father's name. He came to this place to discover it, if he could."

"And he has found a father—a father who will be proud to acknowledge him."

"Acknowledge him!" echoed Daniel, scornfully, "do you think he will acknowledge you?" Do you suppose that hatred of you has not been his religion? It has. And you would acknowledge him? You break his mother's heart, and bequeath to him a heritage of shame, and then one fine day, four-and-twenty years after that poor heart was broken, you meet your son upon the road-side, and it is your caprice to acknowledge him. You stained his fair young life with the brand of illegitimacy. He can refuse to acknowledge a father on whom the law gives him no claim."

"There shall be no question of illegitimacy," cried Mr. Jerningham, eagerly; "it is in my power to prove him legitimate."

"Yes, by a legal quibble. Do you think he will accept such rehabilitation?"

"What other reparation can I make?"

"Conjure the dead from their graves. Call back to life the girl whose womanhood you made one long remorse. Restore the country tradesman and his wife, who died of their daughter's shame. Give back to that young man the years of boyhood and youth, in which he has felt the double sting of poverty and disgrace. Do these things, and your son will honour you."

Mr. Jerningham was silent.

"Let me share your watch," he pleaded presently, in a broken voice.

"You are welcome to do that," answered Daniel;" and when it shall please God to restore him, I will not stand between you and the voice of his heart. Win his affection if you can; no counsel of mine shall weigh against you."

CHAPTER XLII.

RECONCILED.

The Aberdeen surgeon arrived late at night, but the setting of the broken arm was deferred till the next day. The patient was now delirious, and Mr. Ramsay, the great man from Aberdeen, having heard the story of St. Kentigern's Cave, pronounced that rheumatic fever had been induced by cold and exposure in that dismal hermitage.

After this came many dreary days and nights, during which the patient hovered between the realms of life and death, tenderly watched by his uncle and Mr. Jerningham, who relieved each other's guard at his bedside.

Then came a blessed change, and he was pronounced out of danger. The delirium gave place to a languid apathy, in which he seemed faintly to recognize the watchers by his bed, but to be too feeble to interest himself in the affairs of this life.

While the patient was still in this stage, Mr. Jerningham persuaded Daniel to return to London, where the ravening editors were clamorous for his presence, and he, yielding to these arguments, left Mr. Jerningham master of the field.

This was what the father wanted, to have his son in his own keeping, to see those dim eyes brighten as they looked at him. To be nurse, valet, companion, friend, and some day, when he had won his son's regard, to say to him suddenly:

"Eustace, forgive me! I am your father!"

While the patient had lain helpless and unconscious, Mr. Jerningham had found the MS. of the great poem, and had read, in those carefully-written pages, the secrets of his son's mind. The perusal of this poem had filled him with pride. He, too, had written verse; but not such verse as this. The grace, the purity of a mind uncontaminated by vice, were visible here, and touched the heart of the weary worldling.

"The romance of his own life is written here," he said. "It is almost a confession. But how unlike that hateful confession which I published at his age! I, whose ambition was to emulate Rousseau—that pinchbeck philosopher who never ceased to be at heart at lackey."

M. de Bergerac and his daughter left Killalochie for Pendarvoch directly the invalid was pronounced out of danger.

When he was well enough to be moved, Mr. Jerningham conveyed him to Pendarvoch, whither he consented to go; but not without some show of wonderment.

"Your friends, M. de Bergerac and his daughter, are there," said Mr. Jerningham.

"You are very kind to wish to take me there," replied the invalid; "but I really think it would be better for me to go back to London to my Uncle Dan. I am quite strong enough for the journey."

"Indeed you are not! Besides, I have set my heart upon your coming to Pendarvoch."

"You are very good. How long is it since my uncle left this place?"

"About five weeks."

"And in that time who has watched and nursed me? For the last week, you, I know. But before that time? I have a vague recollection of seeing you always there—in that chair by the bed. Yes, I had a faint consciousness of your tender nursing. I do not know how to thank you. At Greenlands I used to think you by no means my friend; and yet you have devoted yourself to me for all these weeks! How can I be sufficiently grateful for so much kindness?"

"My presence has not been disagreeable to you?" faltered the guilty watcher.

"Disagreeable! I should be a wretch indeed if I were not grateful—if I were not deeply touched by so much kindness. Your presence has been an unspeakable comfort to me; your face has grown as familiar, and almost as dear to me, as Uncle Dan's. Forgive me for having ever thought differently—for having misunderstood you so at Greenlands."

"Forgive me, Eustace," said Mr. Jerningham, earnestly.

"Forgive you! For what offence?"

"Do not ask that question. Clasp my hand in yours, so, and say, 'With all my heart, I forgive you.'"

The invalid stared in feeble wonder, but did not repulse the hand that grasped his.

"With all my heart, I forgive whatever wrong your prejudice may have done me."

"It has been a deeper wrong than prejudice. Look at these two hands, Eustace; none can deny the likeness there."

Again the invalid stared wonderingly at the speaker.

"Look!" cried Mr. Jerningham, "look at these clasped hands."

Eustace looked at the two hands linked together. In every detail of form and colour, the likeness between them was perfect.

"Do you remember what De Bergerac said of us the first time we met at his dinner-table?" asked Mr. Jerningham.

"I remember his saying something about a resemblance between you and me."

"A notion which you repudiated."

"I think it was you who first repudiated the idea," said Eustace, with a faint smile.

"It is quite possible. I have been insanely jealous of you. But that is over now. Do you know by what right I have watched by this bed? Do you know why I persuaded your uncle to leave you, that I might watch alone?"

"I can imagine no reason."

"The right which I claimed was the right of a father. Yes, Eustace, it was on your father's knees your head rested as we brought you home from death. It is your father who has watched you day and night through this weary illness."

"Oh, God!" cried Eustace, with a stifled groan. "Is this true?"

"As true as that you and I are here, face to face."

"Do you know that I have sworn to hate you? For the man who broke my mother's heart I can never have any feeling but abhorrence. Your kindness to me I reject and repudiate. We are natural enemies, and have been from the hour in which I first learned the meaning of shame."

"I have heard you plead the cause of Christianity. Is this Christianlike, Eustace?"

"It is natural."

"And you say that Christianity is something higher than nature. Prove it now to me, who have been something of a Pagan. Let me discover the superiority of your creed to my vague Pantheism. Look at me! I, your father, who have never knelt to mortal man, and but too seldom to God, I kneel by your bed, and ask, in abject humility, to be forgiven. I know that I cannot bring back the injured dead. I know that I cannot atone for the past. But if that gentle spirit has found a quiet haven whence she can look back to those she loved on earth, I *know* it would console her to see me forgiven. Judge me as if your mother stood by your side.

"She would forgive you," murmured Eustace; "God created her to suffer and pardon."

"And will you refuse the pardon she would have granted? You forgave me just now, when our hands were clasped in friendship. Do you think you can recall that forgiveness? The words have been spoken. I have the ancient belief in the power of spoken words. Eustace, am I to kneel in vain to my only son?"

The young man covered his face with his hands. He had sworn to hate this man, his arch-enemy, and the enemy had taken base advantage of his weakness, and had stolen his affection. This pale, worn face, worn with the weary night-watches of the past six weeks, was not the face of a foe. His mother—yes, she would have forgiven, and her wrongs were greater than his. And if, from the Heaven her penitence had won, she looked back to earth, it would grieve that gentle spirit to see disunion here.

There was a long pause, and then the son extended his hand to his father.

"For my mother's wrongs I have hated you," he said: "for her sake I forgive you."

This was all. On the same day they travelled to Pendarvoch, and on that night Eustace slept in the picturesque castle that sheltered Helen and her father. All was harmony and affection. The invalid gained strength rapidly, and spent his evenings in a long, panelled saloon, with his father and his two friends.

He told them now, for the first time, the story of that walk which had so nearly cost him his life: how, finding the tide gaining upon him as he neared the inlet of the cliffs, he had sought there some means of reaching the heights above, and, alone, had essayed to clamber to the Saint's Cave. This feat he had achieved, thanks to his experience as a gymnast; but in the last desperate scramble into the mouth of the cave he had broken his arm, and from the pain of this injury he had fainted. Of the two nights and days which he had spent in that narrow retreat, he remembered nothing distinctly. He had only a vague sense of having suffered cold and hunger, and of being tormented, almost to madness, by the perpetual roar of the waves, which had seemed to thunder at the very mouth of the cavern, and to be for ever threatening his destruction.

For a month Eustace stayed at Pendarvoch, and during this time the great poem appeared, and won from the press such speedy recognition and kindly appreciation as would scarcely have been accorded to the work of an unknown poet, if Daniel Mayfield and Mr. Jerningham had not both exerted their utmost influence in its behalf. Daniel did, indeed, with his own hand, write more than one of the notices which elevated his nephew to a high rank among the younger poets.

There remained now only the grand question of the new-found son's legitimation; but here Mr. Jerningham found himself obstinately opposed.

"I will accept your affection with all filial gratitude," said Eustace; "but I will take no pecuniary benefit from your hands, neither will I accept a name which you refused to my mother."

"That is to make your wrongs irreparable."

"All such wrongs are irreparable."

Long, and often repeated, were the arguments held between the father and son upon this subject. But Eustace was not to be moved by argument. From this new-found father, he would receive nothing. For the rest, his literary career had opened brightly, and the fruits of his poem enabled him to enter himself at the Temple as a student of law.

One day in June, Eustace came to Greenlands to renew his suit with M. de Bergerac, by Mr. Jerningham's advice, and this time found his suit prosper.

"Jerningham advises me to consult only my daughter's heart," said the exile, "and that is yours."

Within a month of this interview there was a quiet wedding at the little Berkshire church, in whose gloomy vault poor Emily Jerningham slumbered—a ceremonial at which Daniel Mayfield shone radiant in an expansive white waistcoat, and with moustache of freshest Tyrian dye. Theodore de Bergerac gave his daughter to her husband; while Harold Jerningham stood by, satisfied with his new *rôle* of spectator.

The bride and bridegroom began their honeymoon in a very unpretentious manner in pleasant lodgings in Folkest[illegible] but one day the bride ventured to suggest that Folke[illegible] a place of which it was possible for the human mind to grow weary.

"If you would only take me to Switzerland?" Helen pleaded, with her sweetest smile.

"My dear love, you forget that, although the most fortunate of created beings, we are, from the Continental innkeeper's point of view, actual paupers."

"Not quite, dear! There was one little circumstance that no one thought it worth while to mention before our marriage; but perhaps it would be as well for you to be informe[illegible] of it now."

She handed to him a paper, of a legal and alarming appearance.

It was a deed of gift, whereby Harold Jerningham, on the one part, bestowed upon Helen de Bergerac, the daughter of his very dear friend, Theodore de Bergerac, for the other part, funded property producing something over three thousand a year.

"Good heavens! he has cheated me after all!" cried Eustace.

"He has told us the story of your birth, dear; his own remorse, and your noble repudiation of all gifts from him. And then he entreated me to let some benefit from his wealth come to you indirectly through me."

Another wedding, as quiet as the simple ceremony in Berkshire, took place just twelve months after Mrs. Jerningham's death. For a year Lucy Alford had lived very quietly among her new friends at Harrow, receiving sometimes a package of new books, and a brief, friendly note, from the editor of the *Areopagus*, for the sole token that she was not utterly forgotten by him. But one day he paid an unexpected visit to the Harrow Parsonage, and finding Miss Alford alone in the pretty garden, asked her to be his wife. Few words were needed for his prayer. The sweet face, with its maiden blushes and downcast eyelids,

told him that he was still beloved, still the dearest, and wisest, and greatest of earthly creatures in the sight of Lucy Alford.

While Eustace and his young wife wander, happy as children, amidst Alpine mountains and by the margin of Alpine lakes, Harold Jerningham schemes for his son's future.

"He shall have the Park Lane house, and go into Parliament," resolves the father. "All my old ambitions shall revive in him."

But scheme as he may, there is always the bitter taste of the ashes which remain for the man who has plucked the Dead-Sea apples that hang ripe and red above the path of life.

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